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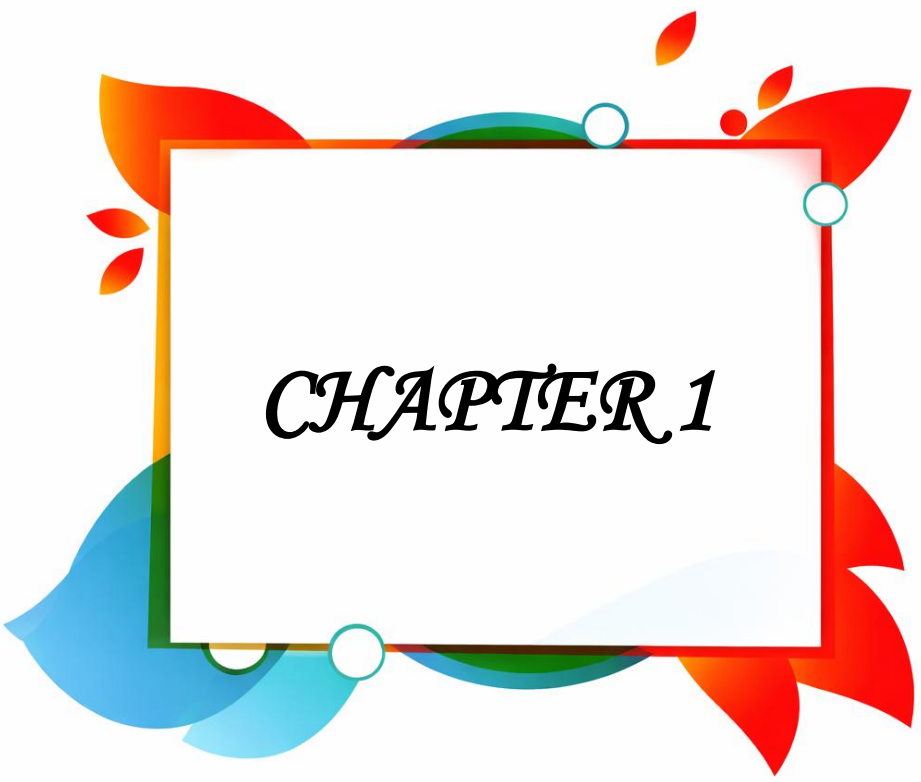
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CHAPTER 1

The Self in the Shadow of Algorithms: Identity Construction and Post-Humanism in *The Every* Novel

Volkan Keklik¹

Introduction

The arrival of digital technologies during the 21st century has greatly reshaped human identity, subjectivity, and agency, making divisions between the organic and algorithmic extremely porous. “*The Every*” (2021) by Dave Eggers emerges as a literary artifact that is salient as it interrogates this ontological shift, with an offering of a dystopian lens through which we can examine the erosion of individual autonomy under the hegemony of corporate surveillance and algorithmic governance (Eggers, 2021, p. 17). This study seeks to elucidate how “*The Every*” articulates anxieties and contradictions of identity formation in an age of pervasive digital surveillance by situating the work of Eggers within theoretical frameworks of posthumanism, Foucauldian biopolitics, and postmodern critiques of technology (Braidotti, 2013, p. 2). A technocratic leviathan, *The Every*, has the eponymous corporate entity at its heart. The entity reaches into every aspect regarding human existence; it affects health, labor, sociality, and selfhood. Delaney Wells, who is the novel’s protagonist, represents resistance paradoxes within this kind of a system, performing algorithmic legibility as well as plotting its subversion (Eggers, 2021, p. 23). Her battle mirrors debates even today regarding agency viability within such a world where subjectivity gets increasingly “datafied”—reduced to predictive models along with quantifiable metrics (Zuboff, 2019, p. 315). Thus, Eggers’ narrative acts as a critical intervention exposing neoliberal capitalism plus technological determinism conspiring for the purpose of foreclosing dissent along with homogenizing identity. This study does engage with key theoretical models. These models can help for us to unpack all of the novel’s implications. The study positions *The Every* as both a cautionary tale and as a provocation, urging readers to confront the ethical and existential dilemmas that are posed by the digital age through a synthesizing of perspectives from posthumanist theorists such as Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway, who provide a lens through which one can analyze the dissolution of the humanist subject, while Michel Foucault’s concepts of

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biopower and of the panopticon illuminate the novel's portrayal of surveillance as a mechanism for control (Haraway, 2004, pp. 7–45). Judith Butler's performativity theory and Gilles Deleuze's "societies of control" framework additionally elucidate the novel's exploration of identity as a curated performance within algorithmic systems (Butler, 1990). Analysis proceeds in four related sections. First, the postmodern and posthumanist underpinnings of the novel, Eggers' critique of grand narratives, and his depiction of identity as a fluid, technologically mediated construct are examined. Second, it will be explored that algorithmic management along with surveillance mechanisms within the novel since it draws parallels to phenomena like wearable tech and social credit systems. Third, it will be interrogated Delaney's fraught resistance since it frames her as an ethical subject navigating the paradoxes of complicity and subversion. Finally, the study reflects on the novel's broader implications for it helps one understand identity as well as humanity in an era when technological integration is accelerating. The study, for undertaking this analysis, contributes to literary scholarship on Eggers' work and intervenes in conversations about human agency's future, digital surveillance ethics, and boundaries between the self and the system. As *The Every* vividly depicts, these debates' stakes extend well beyond fiction's field, demanding we urgently engage critically in our algorithmic world.

Dave Eggers' *The Every* operates as a postmodern paradigmatic novel that foregrounds ironic self-awareness and destabilizes subjectivity while also subverting grand narratives. Eggers constructs a fragmented and hyper-mediated world in which reality and simulation dissolve into one, and that evokes Jean Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1994). *The Every*, a corporate amalgamation of tech monopolies that refracts reality through algorithmic data, gamification, and behavioral economics, and this renders the world knowable only through digital proxies. This systematized reduction of lived experience to metrics and user ratings mirrors what Lyotard termed the postmodern "incredulity toward metanarratives." (Lyotard, 1984) With a technoutopian logic of surveillance and control that enacts a dystopian compression of freedom and complexity, it replaces ethical or humanistic models, despite claims to serve the public good. Rhetorical architecture is what permeates all of the novel's irony. Delaney's deceit parallels postmodern texts' metafictional inclinations. Delaney surreptitiously planned the demise of *Every's* ideology because characters are aware of narrative construction, as well as complicit in it. It offers up multiplicities and contradictions instead of any unifying closure which the novel resists. The police state is frightening and ordinary. The *Every's* employees are ignorant and involved now. Eggers invites readers to question their own passive complicity as well as not only technological authoritarianism by embedding critiques within the absurdity of its premise—a world where even dog toys and social interactions are hyper-regulated. *The Every* exemplifies what

Linda Hutcheon calls “historiographic metafiction,” and it blends satire into socio-political commentary. The novel acknowledges limitations of fiction in altering systemic injustice, plus it interrogates the epistemological and ethical consequences of total datafication(Hutcheon, 1989). Eggers' prose, because it is laced with parodic undertones and pastiche, does not offer moral clarity but enacts a quintessential postmodern gesture: destabilizing the very conditions under which meaning is produced. Eggers depicts *The Every* as an omnipotent digital regime along with rendering human agency nearly obsolete plus articulates a critical posthumanist perspective. Rosi Braidotti theorizes posthumanism and thus decenters the autonomous human subject while at once favoring a distributed, networked being co-constituted with technology(Braidotti, 2013, p. 2). Delaney, as the protagonist, exists and also feels constant tension between her human impulses in addition to the machinic protocols that do govern her world. She must craft for herself an identity that can be read by such algorithmic recognition systems to do every tech and to speak optimization's neolanguage of “absorbability.” The *Every's* corporate panopticon views people as data points assemblages. *Every's* algorithmic surveillance renders Delaney's memories as well as biometric data, facial scans, and behavioral tendencies legible in addition to actionable. She becomes a posthuman subject when she redefines ontology not just when technology augments her. Her value and selfhood dictate machine readability instead. Eggers' narrative critiques this shift since it represents a world where the posthuman condition does not liberate, but disciplines; predictive analytics and behavioral conformity dominate this world. Capital codes a docile body in place of *The Every* liberating the posthuman. Eggers echoes some of Donna Haraway's warnings (Haraway, 2004, pp. 7–45), yet he lacks all of Haraway's envisioned emancipatory politics regarding posthuman subject commodification. Delaney's infiltration strategy weaponizing data fluency against the system implies resistance potential. Yet, resistance still becomes trapped within the system's rules: to doubt company, people must have it scan them. Subversion and subsumption thus define the posthuman subject in *The Every*. Eggers narrates, foregrounding just how total surveillance and algorithmic profiling do collapse customary identity constructs. In *The Every*, digital doubles replace the concept of a stable, coherent self: these doubles curate personas along with make up behavior, gather data, recognize faces, and take biometrics. Delaney's actions show just how identity turns into a performance created for corporate approval since they stem from the performative identity theory by Judith Butler (Butler, 1990). She behaves, speaks, also she appears physically distinct so she can absorb herself more easily into the *Every* system. The represented self is supplanted and not merely just extended by the digital self. Delaney understands the system sees appearance not a person's true self. *Every* device mediates her social interactions, scrubbed from her past, and scores reduced her morality to compliance. This transformation mirrors Sherry Turkle's “tethered self” theory(Turkle, 2011). People stay connected to digital networks

that shape experience, even alone. Delaney experiences anxiety about being “shammed” by the Samaritan app. That kind of anxiety is one that encapsulates both shame and also reputation, and those replace legal or ethical frameworks. The identity of The Every is racialized and is deeply gendered. Technologies of Every reinforce social hierarchies that exist under a guise of objectivity. Through algorithmic biases, these hierarchies are reinforced. Cultural specificities are disfavored behind a homogenized subjectivity, though Eggers avoids racial commentary, whose erasure is suggested by data logic's implications. Digital identity newly controls biopolitics in this way, reminding people of Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality. Eggers' fictional universe shows Michel Foucault's panopticon concept, where power works through visibility plus internalized surveillance (**Foucault, 1995**). In *The Every*, the omnipresent company watches, rates, and records all people, creating a carceral society. Toward conformity, users of the Samaritan app shame each other the control apparatus is participatory and decentralized. This lateral surveillance aligns with Foucault's disciplinary power idea. This power functions through the internalization of norms, not overt repression. Every employee is subject to biometric tracking as something to be expected. Also, every employee is subject toward reputation scoring and behavior quantification. The pervasive theme of the novel reveals self-monitoring. Each individual subjects himself or herself to surveillance and makes himself or herself an agent of surveillance in a society in which surveillance is networked instead of merely top-down. Eggers shows us the banality of power. Dictators do not wield it, though algorithms, protocols, along with consumer habits do. The Every obsesses over health data as well as emotional regulation with productivity tracking. These obsessions represent Foucault's biopolitics theories. Dan Faraday's compulsive workouts as well as mandatory MRIs show the body to be a data field that is to be optimized, which is no longer private. Eggers' dystopia has an insidious quality since the surveilled are complicit. For the sake of convenience as well as safety and social capital, people submit themselves to observation. This observation by people is constant and willingly undertaken. Foucault's claim that modern power masks itself as beneficence is depicted by this dynamic (Foucault, 1978). The alibi for deep incursions into personal autonomy turns into The Every's ideology regarding transparency, efficiency, as well as choice. Foucault's warning is ultimately echoed by Eggers: our consent is all the surveillance society requires, not tyrants.

In *The Every*, the wearable device known as the “oval” functions as a post-human prosthesis that reorganizes human life around the logic of data, representing far more than just a fitness tracker or biometric monitor. The oval, which all employees wear and soon all citizens will, represents technocratic rationalism encroaching upon the most intimate spheres of bodily autonomy. It tracks heart rates with glucose levels. Also, emotional volatility in addition to exercise routines are tracked. Dan Faraday interrupts his conversation with

Delaney when one of the early scenes within the novel depicts him. His oval signals an ideal exercise interval has ended, so Dan jogs in place until it does: “Dan began to jog in place, picking up the pace until he was a blurry mess of knees and fists. This went on for two minutes, no more, at which point a celebratory sound came from his oval, and he stopped.”(Eggers, 2021, p. 20) The moment shows activity tracking along with bodily regulation's outsourcing to a corporate algorithm. Eggers crafts a world in which the oval normatively modifies behavior and also biopolitically controls. Insurers, employers, and government agencies obtain its data, so escaping its oversight is not possible. In this society, failure to comply with the oval's recommendations is a civic liability, not merely a health risk. An optimized state constantly pushes the subject toward it, a concept that resonates with Rosi Braidotti's “the posthuman convergence.” This frames human existence as twisted inextricably with smart technologies, global risk economies, ecological interdependence, and The Every's vision of life where the biological body enjoys no sovereignty of self-regulation but is continuously reprogrammed through externalized metrics (Braidotti, 2013, p. 2). This is also in fact a clear reflection for “instrumentarian power,” as it was termed by Shoshana Zuboff. The oval symbolizes the tuning mechanism which provides feedback to train the body to react to measurable signals also a governance mode tuning behavior by structuring action conditions (Zuboff, 2019, p. 315). Users now wonder about sensations. Rather, they inquire what their device says. The human body, in effect, becomes as an interface: a platform for corporate monitoring. Eggers's writing disturbingly extrapolates. Since smartwatches, fitness apps, and mental health monitors are ubiquitous today, a future wherein health and performance are public responsibilities rather than private endeavors is being laid. The novel interrogates organic spontaneity as it undergoes erosion. Every sneeze, heartbeat, or craving is logged, analyzed, and then someone acts on it. A world not lived is constructed by The Every through the oval. Identity is constructed via The Every inside a data-driven firm. Delaney Wells is scrutinized through a scan of her thorough digital footprint instead of personal interviews or references. Information floods the system when she submits her thumb to a scanner: “Delaney put her thumb on the scanner and a grid of photos, videos and data appeared on Rowena’s screen. Delaney had not herself seen those pictures (Eggers, 2021, p. 5). Eggers dramatizes the loss of personal sovereignty as a result of algorithmic surveillance. Delaney is not who she says she is, instead of who the system determines her to be. Gilles Deleuze, within his seminal work on societies of control, argues that the modern individual disaggregates into “dividuals”—data fragments used to manage populations (Deleuze, 1992, p. 5). Eggers' novel vividly expresses this idea. The company’s AI systems do analyze a calculable persona that is formed from Delaney’s habits, from her preferences, from facial recognition matches, from biometric data, and even from her posture. Identity is not natural. The implication is indeed quite clear: It is indeed computed. This concept is reinforced further by the Shame Aggregate, a chilling

novel invention. Social misconduct by users of the Samaritan app like littering and emotional outbursts can be recorded and reported. The videos that result can go quite viral, and this subjects the individual to both public scorn and numerical penalization. This moral compass outside makes people comply instead of using conscience. As Byung-Chul Han argues, such transparency cultures annihilate ambiguity and do enforce an oppressive positivity, where everyone watches, as well as thus coerces, people into constantly surveilling themselves (Han, 2015, p. 8). Delaney must work to construct for herself a synthetic identity. This identity is designed for alignment to the Every's expectations during her infiltration. Her beliefs and her affiliations along with her background are things by which algorithmic standards are tactically met. This need mirrors a wider cultural change where folks act out selfhood and control it for algorithmic use. The subject is decoded rather than known. It is modelled rather than understood. It exists beyond comprehension. Eggers constructs a dystopia. Data systems must have an ability to read authenticity so that it can matter there. Existence is filtered in The Every. An algorithmic sieve filters into one's very existence. People do earn neither trust nor respect by means of interaction or of experience, but instead by satisfying models that are predictive. Algorithms do more than shape subjectivity; they create it. Delaney's attempts to gain system recognition expose identity issues in our AI age: identity lists data instead of telling tales. Maybe the most ethically complicated aspect of Eggers' novel lies in its own portrayal of the digitalising subject: a human being who is adapting in order to be absorbed by digital logics. Delaney opposes the Every on ideological grounds because he must conform to its culture to subvert it. By her, its language is spoken, its values mimicked, and its symbols of allegiance adorned. She says corporate terms like "absorbability" and "learning a world" and dons the oval to clear the firm's AI checks. "Forgive me, Delaney thought. Everything henceforth "from here on out is lies"—her confession speaks to both the ethical costs and the psychological costs of resisting becoming (Eggers, 2021, p. 6). Delaney represents herein what N. Katherine Hayles describes: the transformation of the liberal humanist subject into a pattern-recognizing system (Hayles, 1999, p. 2). Interfaces are optimized for data exchange; body and mind are no longer sites of authenticity or interiority. Delaney succeeds in infiltrating the Every if she is able to produce legible patterns, not if she does believe truly. She must become legible for the machine. It must be subverted. Her moral complexity encodes this paradox: she fights the system using its tools. She takes a risk of being just like people she fights in that action. Eggers suggests furthermore that in fact a false promise may be the resistance itself. In a saturated world and with surveillance along with predictive modeling, the system may prefigure and also neutralize every act that shows defiance. The system does not fear rebellion; it is anticipated and absorbed instead. Delaney rebelled and that is something that is admirable. Her efforts may be all for naught however and that still haunts her. Thus the subject being digitalized faces more than merely a moral problem. Instead, it is being caught

within such an ontological trap. Emotional authenticity along with relationality are concepts that are also questioned in a deep way by the novel. Dan Faraday, a seemingly benign Every employee, reveals grief over a lost spouse and shares biometric data and videos. Delaney, intending to deceive upon entering the conversation, is emotionally disarmed. The moment is one that blurs all that divides the digital from all that is human. Wearable tech archives, processes, and shares mourning. What does it mean to mourn back then? What is algorithmically curated content that is mediating empathy for people? Eggers does not easily provide answers. He sketches instead toward a digital future where technological framing subjects identity, emotion, and rebellion. The subject, fragmented—shifting between rebellion with assimilation, agency and automation—is not free yet digitalising. The Every resists straightforward categorization here. It is more than simply a bad place. It is a mirror.

Dave Eggers's *The Every* offers up a crystallized and also scathing satire of the contemporary corporate surveillance by way of its sobering depiction of that eponymous mega-corporation which controls near to every aspect of all its users' and employees' lives. Like a direct sequel to *The Circle*, *The Every* represents a dystopian future in which algorithmic management transcends customary HR practices and predicts and controls behavior as an omnipresent system. Eggers makes *The Every* a combination of actual big tech firms such as Amazon, Google, and Facebook. Eggers combines social media and e-commerce to reveal a data-driven society's scary, logical result since it surveils. The company takes in smaller startups by way of billion-dollar acquisitions. A technocratic ideology that worships efficiency, safety, with behavioral optimization over human autonomy is thus reinforced (Eggers, 2021, p. 17). Systems of artificial intelligence and also algorithms for behavior handle management at the Every. This responsibility is not delegated by people to people. These technologies do not merely monitor but rather predict and dictate behavior because they use performance metrics, psychological profiling, and even biometric data. The oval bracelet that employees wear is symbolic of the ultimate integration of body as well as corporation, a wearable surveillance device that tracks not just health data but also emotional responses plus behavioral tendencies (Eggers, 2021, p. 20). The bracelet thus erodes that boundary between the private and the professional, collapsing the subject into a state for perpetual visibility. It is the final managerial influence that the algorithm gains. It is truly invisible, completely infallible, and completely inescapable. Managers at The Every practice Michel Foucault's concept of biopower, in which power operates via regulating as well as normalizing life itself in place of through violence. Foucault writes that "Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself." (Foucault, 1978) This kind of logic is exemplified by The Every's biometric and behavioral

monitoring. Until corporate ideals align with their behaviors, employees are evaluated, shaped, corrected, and optimized. Algorithmic management is like an engine that has control and transformation, in that it effaces distinctions that are between employer and self. The Every's recruitment process is depicted as an extension of its overarching algorithmic regime, where automated systems designed for compatibility, docility, and absorbability as well as human interviewers screen potential employees. The Every makes use of a battery of AI screenings. Before human interaction, Delaney Wells's first encounter shows this happening. Surveillances do begin at the time that they scan facial features, iris patterns, posture, as well as even digital history for the generation of a psychological profile (Eggers, 2021, p. 11). This process signals an important shift from resume-based selections toward totally capturing information, wherein the candidate acted, behaved, and they also made digital footprints as the basis for their suitability. "Disobedience," a term now corporate doublespeak for marketable nonconformity, is the disguise for ideological conformity that *The Every* seeks and Eggers stresses. Digital performance shapes identity preemptively because the company uses a Foucauldian disciplinary mechanism to recruit. Delaney knowingly makes a fake work image to beat the filters, aware of the trick. This act is underscoring the collapse of authenticity with favor for algorithmic legibility (Eggers, 2021, p. 15). That even the illusion of rebellion is something that is commodified is indeed the irony. The company wants no real resistance, but it wants a version sanitized. The version reinforces the scheme. Gilles Deleuze gave warning about this very shift in his own theory of "societies of control" because post-disciplinary societies function by way of internalizing control mechanisms that are within the subject, and that makes resistance a part of the very system itself (Deleuze, 1992, p. 5). The recruitment rituals at The Every dramatize this shift. Unseen algorithmic eyes surveil each performative act at every stage, and the company's preordained template is like an avatar, not a successful individual candidate.

Furthermore, "absorbability" as a hiring criterion represents the desire to assimilate not innovate. The company values those who integrated smoothly, both ideologically and also physically. Therefore the recruitment process filters out unpredictability not selects it. For candidates like Delaney, dance and performance are necessities, which reveals a new corporate anthropology: one in which data measures personhood and rhetoric of empowerment cloaks compliance. The technocratic dominance of The Every destroys individual identity in a most chilling and systematic way. Eggers presents a society where autonomy, authenticity, and dissent are structurally eliminated not just discouraged. Delaney conflicts internally since she simultaneously abhors and is complicit in The Every thus dramatizing the moral paradox of existing within a system that obliterates the very conditions for resistance. As the narrative progresses we see Delaney increasingly subsumed within the company's logic,

even as she plots its downfall. The tools and interfaces of *The Every* continuously frame her interactions, movements, and decisions that occur. These are the oval bracelet, the phone issued by the company, and social scoring systems everywhere. Her agency erodes incrementally and relentlessly since every gesture is now captured, is incentivized, or is punished. Eggers aligns his critique to Byung-Chul Han's perception that "In the neoliberal regime, the subject is no longer a subject of obedience, but a subject of achievement." (Han, 2015, p. 8) In this way, the drive toward achievement becomes indistinguishable from complicity. An individual becomes like a node in a corporate algorithmic network. This collapse has implications. These are broader than one character in scope. The Every seeks for someone to replace alternatives that are quantifiable and optimized for all "messy" forms of human interaction including friendship, parenting, love, civic responsibility. Regulations in micro form of language and also behavior plus consumption and even also leisure make all of this visible within the company. Its ever-evolving policies articulate a kind of total institutionalization for life itself as the ultimate goal. The dissolution of boundaries, both professional and personal, is accompanied by the creation of a simulation through the use of metrics, which then gives rise to the formation of identity. It is told algorithmic management exempts nobody even from death. Since it stretches control past the physical, the company saves memories, builds personalities, and uses them for data-mining or mental guidance. Identity lacks sacredness and stability within this necropolitical regime so someone mines data then modifies data then monetizes data. The individual is reduced down to what remains. Residue that is of behavior becomes endlessly codified, and it is not a soul or self. Ultimately, *The Every* is in fact a philosophical meditation for us on the end of individuality. It is even more than just simply a dystopian type of vision of technological overreach. Corporate power, when fused alongside algorithmic management and surveillance capitalism, dissolves categories of personhood. It also dissolves autonomy. Eggers's novel serves as both a warning and an elegy because it mourns the loss of an identity that once resisted being reduced to data, but now, in the world of *The Every*, has been fully consumed by it.

In Dave Eggers' *The Every*, Delaney Wells represents a subtle model for resistance within a totalizing digital system, she manifests a rebellion not through overt confrontation but she tactically infiltrates. As a character formed by post-humanist conditions, Delaney's tactics challenge the Every's omnipresent surveillance, algorithmic governance, and behavioral compliance. Her rebellion is not spontaneous but reactionary. Instead, it is an organized act of self-insertion, so long-planned, into the system which she seeks to dismantle. Delaney desires to "kill the Every," a desire emerging from not naïve optimism but from a calculated recognition that internal sabotage can change systems. Eggers rebels together with ethical ambiguity in her words and in her acts, negotiating that same line connecting subversion to assimilation. Her strategy is one that echoes with

post-structuralist and post-humanist critiques. People internalize power that is productive and it is diffuse, not residing solely in repressive institutions such as Foucault said (Foucault, 1995). As she enters the Every, Delaney precisely curates a digital identity that aligns with the company's corporate utopian values. Her fake thesis champions "Kind Market Mastery," the concept that monopoly power is welcome if paired with consumer happiness. It is a copy of ideological agreement, which she crafts to win inside entry. She says at the start, "Forgive me... Everything from here on out is lies." (Eggers, 2021, p. 23) Thus, her revolt enacts a post-humanist deed. She forges at least an identity through a simulation with ironic appropriation for a contradiction represented. Eggers represents *The Every* as something like a postmodern panopticon where resistance must be enacted even through the very channels of control. Delaney manipulates corporate jargon and performs loyalty, such as when she dons Every-branded wearables and internalizes performative wellness culture; this constitutes a subversive mimicry. This echoes Judith Butler's theory of performativity agency appears when people repeat standard acts with variation (Butler, 1990). Delaney's revolt enacts obedience to disrupt the system's automated certainties internally. The necessary deceptions of her mission mark the characterization of Delaney as an ethical subject due to her discomfort. Her interior battle highlights one of the fundamental post-humanist tensions: how can one morally act as just an agent within a system that diffuses responsibility and technologically mediates and then redefines subjectivity? Delaney exists at this juncture according to Eggers being both defiant and involved. Delaney is also manufactured coupled with self-constituting. Her reflection involves ethical subjectivity not definition. Because those she deceives seem "normal" and even kind, her guilt surfaces as she interacts with Dan Faraday and others, not because she is lying. Eggers does not offer moral binaries. Instead, he presents a world in which systemic opacity clouds ethical judgment as technocratic power faces humans. For people such as Dan, Delaney has empathy, something that complicates her mission though it does not deter it. This emotional as well as moral ambivalence continually haunts her decision toward pursuing destruction from within. Rosi Braidotti's post-humanist ethics theorizes about an ethics of "becoming" grounded in relationality and situated knowledge (Butler, 1990). This mode of ethical engagement is represented by Delaney's resistance. She is not a hero in the usual way rather a point inside a web and she handles guilt oversight defense. A commitment to systemic accountability reflects also her refusal of any disengagement even when she is tempted by nostalgia or domesticity. An ethics shows within the Every because of her choice. Despite the psychological toll, this ethics is calculated, relational, and embedded. The ethical subjectivity from Delaney allows for Eggers to interrogate at the concept about free will. That idea receives deep exploration. The Every's omniscient systems reduce choice toward predictive preference, and they collapse the space for autonomous decision-making. This cut is known by Delaney. Her resistance stems from the idea of it. She claims

power in a system built to deny it via subversion, invasion, and trickery. Her actions affirm a kind of ethical willfulness against the deterministic logic of the Every an insistence that moral action is still possible even within algorithmic capture. In *The Every*, Delaney resists, symbolically rebelling in a novel fashion—one heeding late-capitalist control's common, secret, and staged frameworks. It is rebellion of ethical improvisation, not pure ideology; subtle destabilizations, not grand gestures. Eggers crafts Delaney as a figure who is post-human in context however human in motive since she deceives, strategizes, along with self-reflects so that she mounts an interior rebellion. Delaney's subversion indicates a route for resistance as algorithms wield power, folks survey distantly, and humans shape identity, occupying the structure parasitically though not denying it totally. Her rebellion coded from within the system's logic is like a slow virus that she seeks to corrupt. Eggers invites all readers for to imagine resistance as being infiltration. It is more like ethical sabotage from deep within than like rupture.

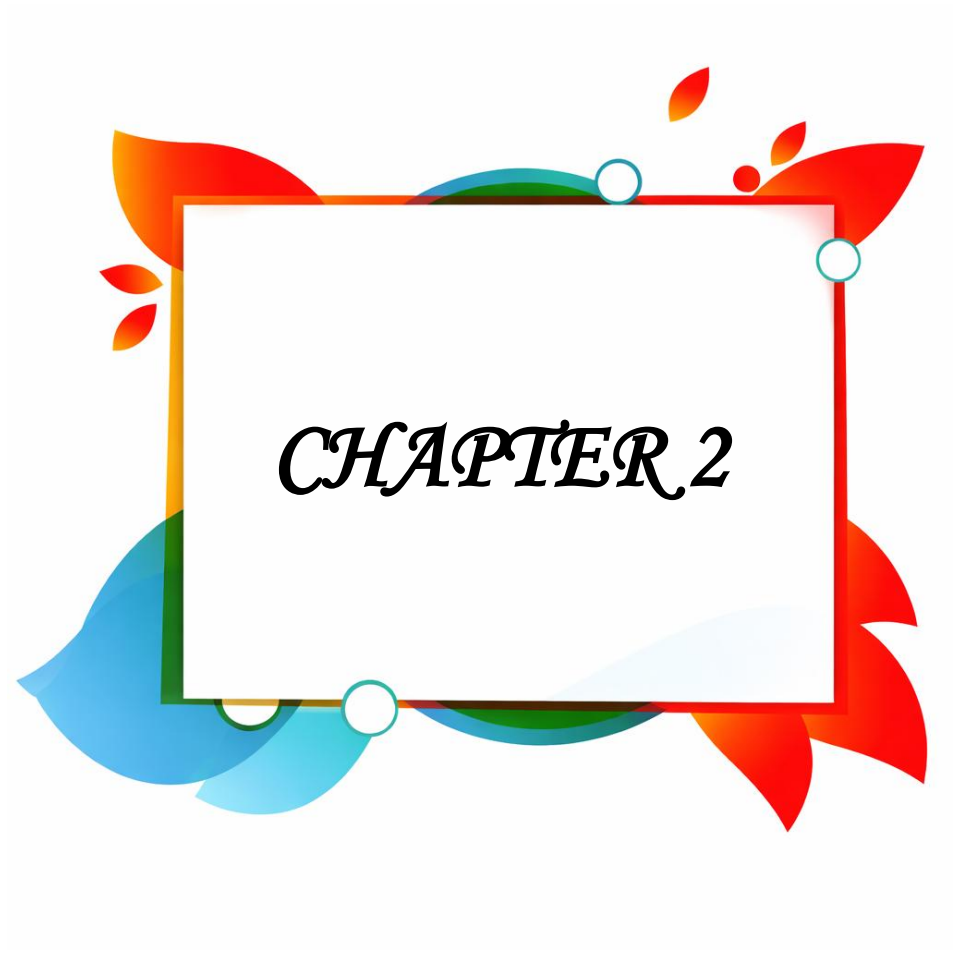
Conclusion

Dave Eggers' *The Every* presents a deep interrogation of algorithmic control, surveillance capitalism, with technological determinism impacting individual identity construction and autonomy due to the digital age from a posthumanist perspective. The novel explores both the ethical as well as the existential consequences arising from the reduction of every aspect of human life to data as well as its shaping via algorithms through the company “The Every” that is a dystopian reflection of today's technological giants. Eggers offers up a technological critique as well as an analysis informed by theoretical frameworks. Examples of such frameworks include Foucauldian biopolitics, also Butler's performative identity theory and even Braidotti's posthumanist ethics. Delaney Wells, main character of the novel, adapts with tactics as she resists in the system. Her fight represents the endeavor to save a person's freedom in a place where algorithms have total control. However, Delaney's performative identity with internal contradictions reveals that even when someone resists, the system can absorb them. Within *The Every*, surveillance works through the voluntary participation of individuals, with system tools that are enabling resistance, aligning with “transparency society ” from Byung-Chul Han and “societies of control” of Deleuze. Eggers stresses free will diminishes and technology transforms people to “dividuals” (data pieces that are divisible). The novel warns regarding the human condition in the digital age: algorithms calculate and optimize identity performance, no longer an intrinsic essence. Foucault's concept of “biopolitics” is in line with turning life itself into an object of control, for the Every's employees are constantly monitored through wearable technologies as well as social scoring systems. Consequently, *The Every* presents a pessimistic yet thought-provoking vision of a future where technology progresses while human values are expended. Eggers asks that the reader consider the comfort and

freedom in digitalization. The novel can do more than just present a literary dystopia. It also does philosophically intervene in today's technology-driven society. Humanity must protect itself within this symbiotic relationship with technology. Humanity also must develop an ethical stance now. "The Every" critically mirrors what the future may hold, and the stance's importance is something that should be remembered.

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The Unseen Hand: Female Agency and the Hero's Journey from Norse Mythology to Modern Fantasy*

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Introduction

Julia Kristeva argues that there is no entirely new or original word or thought in the world (Kristeva, 1972, p. 348). According to this perspective, every emotion, idea, and concept has already appeared at some point in human history. Since individuals draw upon similar experiences and conceptual frameworks in their daily lives, producing a completely original expression becomes increasingly unlikely. In this context, the German term *Weltliteratur*—literally meaning “world literature”—corresponds closely to the notion of intertextuality. The concept assumes that every word uttered anywhere in the world forms part of humanity’s shared cultural heritage. Within literary and cultural studies, intertextuality emphasizes that literary works and other artistic productions do not exist in isolation; rather, they are connected through networks of references, influences, and transformations. Similarities between artistic works may therefore arise not only among texts of the same genre but also across different artistic forms and historical periods. Such interactions may occur between works produced in entirely different contexts or between texts written centuries apart within the same tradition. Indeed, this phenomenon can even be observed in myths, which constitute some of the earliest narrative forms in human culture. Because every text inevitably carries traces of earlier narratives and occasionally functions as a rewriting or reinterpretation of them, universal and timeless myths often serve as particularly fertile sources of inspiration for later literary productions. Historical observations further reveal that societies living in distant geographical regions and maintaining limited cultural interaction frequently produced legends that nevertheless display striking similarities in terms of human emotions, narrative patterns, and archetypal plot structures. Norse mythology represents one of the most enduring mythological traditions, containing a vast

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body of oral narratives, some of which were later preserved in written form. Like many mythological traditions produced in patriarchal societies, Norse mythological narratives often foreground the heroic exploits of male warriors and rulers. This narrative emphasis provides valuable insight into the socio-cultural structures of the period in which these stories emerged. Although female characters are present within these narratives, their roles generally appear less prominent than those of male heroes. Nevertheless, notable exceptions challenge this pattern. One such example is Lagertha, an important female figure in Norse mythology. Within Viking society, historical and legendary sources indicate that women could occasionally participate in warfare in addition to fulfilling their traditional social roles. Lagertha is portrayed as a formidable warrior and the wife of the legendary king Ragnar Lothbrok. Her participation in battles and her strategic support played a decisive role in Ragnar's rise to legendary status. In several narratives, she accompanies him during crucial military campaigns and intervenes at critical moments, thereby contributing significantly to the success of his heroic journey. Through such portrayals, Lagertha emerges as a rare but significant example of female heroism within a largely male-centered mythological tradition. From ancient mythological traditions to contemporary literary production, it is possible to observe that many modern fictional narratives continue to draw inspiration from mythic structures and motifs. While numerous attempts to recreate mythological patterns in modern fiction fail to leave a lasting cultural impact, certain works have achieved a resonance comparable to that of ancient myths. These works, which may be described as "modern myths," often incorporate archetypal narrative structures, heroic journeys, and symbolic conflicts that closely resemble mythological narratives. Such parallels demonstrate how intertextuality operates across different historical periods and literary traditions. One of the most influential examples of modern myth-making in contemporary literature is *The Lord of the Rings*. Widely regarded as one of the most significant fantasy narratives of the twentieth century, the series presents a fictional world largely structured around a patriarchal social order. The narrative revolves around the epic journey of a group of heroes who attempt to save the world from an overwhelming evil force. Much like the heroic quests found in ancient mythologies, the protagonists undergo numerous trials, confront powerful adversaries, and endure the loss of beloved companions. Ultimately, the triumph of good over evil results in the restoration of peace and the possibility of a stable future for subsequent generations. An examination of the characters across the three volumes of the series reveals a narrative atmosphere that closely resembles mythological storytelling. Nevertheless, the relative scarcity of female heroes in *The Lord of the Rings* is particularly noteworthy. Most of the central events unfold around male characters, reinforcing the impression of a predominantly male-centered narrative universe. However, the limited presence of female heroes does not imply that heroism is exclusively attributed to male characters. On the contrary, a closer analysis demonstrates that female characters

play crucial roles at decisive moments in the narrative. Their interventions often provide essential support to the main heroes during critical stages of the journey. In several instances, the assistance of female characters alters the course of events, enabling the protagonists to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles and ultimately complete their heroic quest. Similarly, the Harry Potter series has become one of the most widely read works of modern fantasy literature since its publication. Comprising seven volumes, the series narrates the life and adventures of the young wizard Harry Potter from childhood to early adulthood. Each installment written by J. K. Rowling introduces new conflicts, challenges, and narrative developments within the magical world. Interestingly, when Rowling initially attempted to publish her work, prevailing prejudices regarding women's capabilities in the fantasy genre had not yet fully disappeared. Consequently, the author chose to use the abbreviated form of her name in order to create the impression of a gender-neutral—or potentially male—author when submitting the manuscript to publishers. This publishing strategy indirectly reflects the broader social prejudices that female characters within her narratives often confront and challenge. Although the narrative primarily follows the experiences of Harry Potter, the fictional universe of the series also reflects a largely male-centered structure. While female characters appear throughout the narrative, many of the central conflicts and events initially seem to revolve around male protagonists. However, a closer examination of the narrative structure reveals a more complex dynamic. Female characters repeatedly play critical roles in shaping the development of the story. Through their intelligence, courage, and strategic actions, they provide essential support that enables the protagonist to survive numerous dangers and ultimately fulfill his heroic mission. In light of these observations, this study aims to examine the roles of female heroes across the continuum from ancient mythological narratives to modern fictional texts. Specifically, it analyzes the legend of Lagertha from Norse mythology alongside two influential modern works of fantasy literature: *The Lord of the Rings* and the Harry Potter series. The findings suggest that an intertextual relationship exists between the representation of female characters in Norse mythology and those in modern fantasy narratives. By focusing on the roles of relatively limited yet symbolically significant female figures within predominantly patriarchal narrative structures, this study seeks to demonstrate how similar narrative patterns and character functions reappear across texts produced in different historical periods. Through this intertextual analysis, the study highlights the continuity of female heroic representation from mythological traditions to contemporary literary narratives.

From Myth to Modernity: Narrative Continuity through Intertextuality

The impulse to incorporate another's expression into one's own work or to reshape it into a new form has long functioned as a fundamental creative dynamic in literary production. Within this framework, the concept of intertextuality offers a theoretical perspective for examining the relationships between texts. Julia Kristeva conceptualizes intertextuality as an approach that addresses the interaction between two or more texts and situates it within the broader field of literary theory; however, the scope of the concept extends far beyond a merely technical relationship between texts (Kristeva, 1972). In a similar vein, Graham Allen emphasizes that intertextuality resists a fixed or singular definition and highlights the conceptual ambiguity surrounding the term (Allen, 2000, p. 2). For this reason, intertextuality should neither be reduced to simple acts of quotation or reference nor regarded as the sole constitutive element of literary production. Rather, it should be understood as a structural principle emerging at the intersection of language, culture, and thought, one that continuously expands the possibilities of meaning-making. Although its theoretical framework was largely systematized within Western intellectual traditions, intertextuality ultimately acquires a universal dimension through processes of textual "transmission" and "transformation," enabling narratives to circulate across cultures, historical periods, and literary traditions. Importantly, the practice of intertextuality existed in literary production long before it was formally theorized by scholars such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, Michael Riffaterre, and Gérard Genette. Even prior to its theoretical articulation, intertextuality functioned as a central mechanism through which texts interacted with and transformed one another, particularly during the transition from oral cultural traditions to written literary forms. Bakhtin's well-known assertion that "no speaker is Adam, so he cannot name objects that have not yet been shown" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 101) underscores the historical continuity of textual dialogue and the inevitability of discursive inheritance. In this sense, meaning is not a fixed concept tied to a stable signifier; rather, it emerges from an ongoing and potentially infinite play of signifiers. As Eagleton notes, signifiers constantly transform into signifieds and vice versa, making it impossible to arrive at a final signifier that is not itself part of this chain (Eagleton, 2011, p. 150). Within such a framework, the emergence of new narratives through intertextual processes becomes inevitable. In literary environments characterized by dense intertextual exchange, each transformed work simultaneously prepares the ground for subsequent texts and becomes a source text for future reinterpretations. Consequently, literary production develops as a chain of relationships linking past, present, and future narratives. Kristeva describes this cyclical process by asserting that every text is born from another text (Kristeva, 1996). Similarly, Aktulum argues that "intertextuality has taken on the important task of reconstructing and revitalising outdated texts" (Aktulum, 1999, p. 190). Through such processes, intertextual relations ensure

literary continuity by bringing the narrative structures, themes, and symbolic patterns of the past into dialogue with the present. In doing so, authors produce texts that remain open to multiple interpretations rather than fixing meaning within a single interpretive centre. It should also be noted that intertextuality does not necessarily require the direct rewriting or complete reconstruction of a previous narrative. At times, even a resemblance in a particular character type, motif, narrative structure, or symbolic scene may establish a meaningful intertextual connection between two works. The similarities observed among certain characters in the texts examined in this study can likewise be interpreted within such an intertextual framework. A considerable portion of these parallels can be traced back to mythological narratives, which have served as one of the most enduring reservoirs of narrative archetypes. Nevertheless, defining myth within precise conceptual boundaries remains difficult. Owing to its complex and multilayered nature, myth cannot easily be reduced to a single, universally accepted definition. As some of the oldest cultural carriers of human societies, myths contain sacred narratives that reflect humanity's attempts to interpret the origins of the universe, existence, and human experience. Since antiquity, various philosophical and theoretical approaches have been proposed to explain the nature and function of myth. Theagenes of Rhegium interpreted myths as allegorical representations of natural phenomena, whereas Anaxagoras viewed them as narratives that attribute human and sometimes morally questionable characteristics to the gods. Plato, particularly in *The Republic*, described myths as fictional stories and expressed concerns about their educational implications. By contrast, Aristotle employed the concept of *mythos* in *Poetics* to refer to plot structure, thereby assigning myth a fundamental aesthetic and structural function within literary composition. In the modern era, myth has been interpreted through diverse theoretical perspectives. Sigmund Freud regarded myths as symbolic manifestations of repressed desires and the dynamics of the individual unconscious, whereas Carl Gustav Jung approached them more positively as expressions of the collective unconscious and shared archetypal imagery embedded within human culture. These differing interpretations reveal that myth is far more than an ancient narrative form; rather, it constitutes a dynamic cultural structure that has continuously shaped the formation of individual identity, collective memory, and cultural interpretation throughout history. For this reason, myths have served as a fertile narrative reservoir for epics, legends, and literary texts, enabling recurring archetypal patterns and narrative motifs to re-emerge in new cultural and historical contexts. In contemporary literature, this continuity frequently manifests through processes of narrative rewriting and retelling. The updating of myths in contemporary literature through processes of retelling does not merely constitute a thematic transfer; rather, it also functions as a practice of constructing new regimes of meaning through narrative techniques. For this reason, the transposition of female agency from its mythic origins into modern

fantasy can be interpreted within the ideological dimension of literary rewriting (Adigüzel, 2023, pp. 226–227).

Representation of Women in Literature from a Historical and Theoretical Perspective

Richard Dyer argues that society's representations of women and the prevailing mindset regarding women's social roles are both reflected and reproduced through cultural forms such as literature and cinema (Dyer, 2006, p. 353). For this reason, literary works cannot be examined independently of the socio-cultural contexts in which they emerge. The representation of female characters in literary texts functions as a significant indicator of how societies conceptualize gender roles and women's position within social structures. Historically, however, women have often been deprived of the opportunity to construct their own representations, while images of women in literature and cinema have largely been confined to passive models and stereotypical patterns produced by patriarchal ideology (Hall, 2017, p. 443). Within these representations, female characters are typically defined either through obedience and submission or through negative and deviant traits. From traditional fairy tales to modern narratives, gender roles have frequently been shaped in accordance with dominant ideological frameworks. In such contexts, women are portrayed as dependent, passive figures, whereas those who challenge male authority are frequently coded as disruptive or threatening elements within the narrative order (Tokdemir, 2019, p. 40). The emergence of the figure of the "New Woman" in England, however, destabilized the long-standing image of the submissive woman and created a symbolic crisis for the male-dominated social order (Berktaş, 2018, p. 143). In response to this perceived threat, the norm of "appropriate female behaviour" was reinforced and disseminated through various cultural and communicative mechanisms. As Berktaş notes, communication tools within patriarchal societies possess the capacity to regulate discourse and suppress alternative forms of expression (Berktaş, 2018, p. 156). Feminist theorists have challenged these constraints particularly at the level of language and discourse. Thinkers such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva have explored the possibility of a specifically "feminine" language capable of disrupting the logic of phallogocentric discourse. Drawing on poststructuralist theory, these scholars critically interrogate the gendered construction of language and highlight how linguistic structures reproduce patriarchal power relations (Wu, 2013, p. 24). In a related argument, Hall associates the feminization of mass culture with the increasing visibility of women as producers within cultural fields historically dominated by men, suggesting that these transformations challenge traditional gender hierarchies in cultural production (Hall, 2017, p. 457). The historical inequality experienced by women has thus been examined both in relation to social structures and within the realm of artistic representation. Simone de Beauvoir connects the oppression of women to the material conditions of the

social infrastructure while interpreting degrading artistic representations of women as part of the ideological superstructure that reinforces this inequality (Moran, 2002, p. 251). Virginia Woolf similarly highlights the structural barriers faced by women in literary history. In her well-known example, Woolf suggests that even if Shakespeare had possessed a sister with equal talent, she would have been unable to achieve comparable recognition due to the limited educational opportunities and social freedoms available to women in early modern England (Woolf, 2016, p. 54). Indeed, until the nineteenth century many female writers—including Charlotte Brontë (Currer Bell), George Eliot, and George Sand—were compelled to publish under male pseudonyms in order to be taken seriously within the literary marketplace. Woolf further argues that a woman attempting to pursue a literary career freely in sixteenth-century England would have encountered severe social restrictions and psychological pressures. According to her, female writers who were forced to shape their works according to externally imposed standards often experienced a weakening of their creative autonomy (Woolf, 2016, p. 57). Nevertheless, Woolf acknowledges that authors such as Jane Austen and Emily Brontë succeeded in transcending many of the masculine literary conventions of their time. In contrast, the popular novel has frequently reproduced established ideological patterns rather than challenging them. As Umberto Eco suggests, although the popular novel may claim a democratic appeal, it generally remains within the boundaries of conventional values at the narrative level and therefore lacks a genuinely “problematic” dimension (Eco, 2017, p. 41). Taken together, these theoretical perspectives underline the importance of examining the roles and functions of female protagonists in literary narratives. Although women’s voices gained increasing visibility in the public sphere following the Enlightenment, this transformation was reflected only gradually in literary representation, where female figures were often relegated to secondary or supportive roles. Yet a closer examination of narrative structures reveals that even when positioned in the background, these figures frequently carry significant ideological and symbolic tensions that shape the deeper structure of the text.

Female Agency and Warrior Identity in Norse Mythology: Lagertha and Ragnar Lothbrok

The term *Viking* is generally used to refer to the seafaring peoples who inhabited the Scandinavian regions of present-day Sweden, Norway, and Denmark between approximately AD 800 and 1100. The etymology of the word, however, remains contested among scholars. One influential interpretation derives the term from the Old Norse *Vikingr*, referring to “one who engages in raiding” (Jesch, 2001, p. 44). In this sense, the word came to be associated with the activities of piracy and maritime expeditions. Other studies suggest that the term may originate from related linguistic forms such as *vik* (bay), *vicus* (trading settlement), or *vic* (fortified place), indicating a connection between the Vikings

and coastal trade or fortified harbour settlements (Holman, 2003, p. 277). Regardless of its precise linguistic origin, the term gradually evolved to denote the Scandinavian warriors, traders, and explorers who played a central role in shaping the political and cultural landscape of early medieval Europe.

One of the defining characteristics of the Viking Age was the deep religious devotion of Scandinavian societies to their traditional pantheon of gods. Scandinavia largely remained pagan until the gradual spread of Christianity toward the end of the Viking Age. Consequently, much of what is known about Norse religion derives from literary sources recorded after the period itself. The principal textual sources of Scandinavian mythology are the *Poetic Edda*, the *Prose Edda*, and the corpus of skaldic poetry. Among these, the Eddas played the most significant role in preserving the mythological traditions of the Viking world. The two Icelandic manuscripts known collectively as the Eddas constitute the primary written sources of Norse mythology and were compiled in the thirteenth century. These texts were written in a Scandinavian language belonging to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family. The Icelandic language, in which the Eddaic texts were recorded, represents one of the closest linguistic continuities with the varieties of Old Norse spoken in medieval Scandinavia. As Christianity spread across the region, Scandinavian languages gradually diverged into distinct national forms. Icelandic, which remained comparatively conservative in its linguistic structure, preserves many of the archaic features that characterize the language of the Eddas.

Eddaic literature exists in two principal forms: prose and verse. The *Poetic Edda*, one of the most important sources of Norse mythology, is a collection of mythological and heroic poems preserved in the Icelandic manuscript known as the *Codex Regius*. These poems are rooted in a long oral tradition and provide valuable insights into the cultural, social, and artistic life of Viking society. Notably, the *Codex Regius* was written approximately three centuries after Iceland's conversion to Christianity, demonstrating how pre-Christian mythological narratives continued to survive within the literary memory of the region. The poems of the Edda recount the deeds of gods, heroes, and legendary figures, thereby offering significant information about the values, traditions, and social structures of Scandinavian society. For example, the myth of the giant Thrym, who steals Thor's hammer, narrates how Thor ultimately recovers the weapon by disguising himself as a bride and infiltrating the giant's hall. Thor's discomfort and anxiety while dressed in women's clothing reflects the Vikings' attitudes toward masculinity and gender norms, suggesting that femininity in men was perceived as socially problematic (Thorpe, 2004, pp. 97–103). While the Eddas constitute the core textual foundation of Norse mythology, additional perspectives on Viking society are provided by external historical sources. One particularly valuable account appears in the *Travels of Ibn Fadlan*, written by the Arab diplomat Ahmad ibn Fadlan during his journey among the Volga Bulgars.

His observations offer rare ethnographic insights into the commercial activities, religious rituals, and everyday practices of the Viking traders—referred to in his narrative as the Rus—who operated along the Volga trade routes.

Ibn Fadlan's account suggests that Viking women occupied a comparatively autonomous and influential position when contrasted with many other societies in early medieval Europe. Historical evidence indicates that women in Viking society enjoyed a degree of social equality with men and participated actively in various aspects of social life. Their roles extended beyond domestic responsibilities to include involvement in economic activities and, in certain circumstances, participation in military conflict. This relative autonomy distinguishes Viking social structures from many contemporary Christian societies in medieval Europe, where women's legal and economic rights were generally more restricted. The traveller also records striking details concerning the physical appearance and social status markers of the Vikings. According to Ibn Fadlan, Viking men were tall and physically imposing, commonly carrying axes, swords, and knives. He describes their swords as broad-bladed weapons of Frankish design and notes that their bodies were adorned with tattoos extending from their toes to their necks. Equally significant are his descriptions of Viking women, whose jewellery functioned as a visible indicator of social status. Ibn Fadlan reports that every woman wore an ornament on her chest made of iron, silver, copper, or gold depending on her husband's wealth. Women also wore necklaces composed of rings of precious metals, and the quantity of jewellery increased in proportion to the economic status of their household. These descriptions indicate that wealth and social hierarchy within Viking society were materially displayed through the adornment of women (Şeşen, 2012, p. 519).

However, Ibn Fadlan's narrative also records disturbing aspects of Viking ritual life, particularly funeral practices. According to his account, when a Viking chieftain died, one of his concubines would volunteer to accompany him in death. The woman who accepted this role underwent a ritualized process that culminated in her sacrifice during the funeral ceremony, after which she was buried alongside the deceased leader. Ibn Fadlan describes how the enslaved woman was subjected to elaborate ceremonial preparations before the final ritual was carried out (Şeşen, 2012, p. 519). Taken together, these observations reveal that Viking society possessed a highly complex structure shaped by commercial networks, ritual traditions, and hierarchical social relations. Women's participation in economic and social life suggests that gender relations within Viking culture operated within a framework that differed from many contemporary European societies. At the same time, the ritual sacrifice of enslaved women and the objectification of concubines demonstrate that this relative autonomy coexisted with deeply patriarchal and violent practices.

From a broader interpretive perspective, the role of women in Viking society appears as multi-layered rather than one-dimensional. Women were positioned alongside their husbands not only as social partners but also as companions whose presence extended symbolically into the afterlife. In this sense, the marital bond carried both social and metaphysical significance. Similarly, the emphasis on jewellery and adornment should not be interpreted merely as an aesthetic detail but as a marker of status, identity, and economic power within the social hierarchy. Thus, Viking women simultaneously functioned as agents of social continuity and as participants in systems structured by patriarchal authority. When considered in relation to Joseph Campbell's conceptualization of the hero as a figure who guides and transforms society, this ambivalent structure suggests that women within Viking narratives may occupy roles that extend beyond passive support. Instead, they often appear as complementary—or even guiding—figures who contribute to the ritual and cultural continuity surrounding heroic figures (Campbell, 1993, p. 337).

The legendary figure of Ragnar Lothbrok, believed to have lived in the Kattegat region during the ninth century, occupies a prominent place within both historical chronicles and mythic narratives. Celebrated for his strategic intelligence and leadership abilities, Ragnar is depicted as a warrior who challenged his ruler in single combat to seize the throne and led Viking expeditions to the shores of England through innovative navigation techniques. Such narratives transformed Ragnar into a semi-mythical hero whose exploits combined historical memory with legendary embellishment. Within this narrative universe, the figure of Lagertha occupies a particularly significant position. The character of Lagertha originates from *Gesta Danorum*, the historical chronicle written by Saxo Grammaticus around the year 1200. According to this account, Lagertha was a loyal companion of Ragnar, the mother of his son Bjorn, and a formidable warrior who protected her husband from assassination attempts and later ruled as a queen. What distinguishes Lagertha from an ordinary historical figure, however, is her association with the mythological archetype of the *shield maiden*. In Norse mythology, the term *skjaldmö* refers to female warriors who fought alongside men on the battlefield, armed with shields and spears. Judith Jesch notes that the concept of the shield maiden is closely connected to the Valkyrie traditions, which were themselves shaped in part by the influence of Greco-Roman narratives concerning the Amazons (Jesch, 2008). Valkyries are typically depicted wearing helmets, armour, and spears, while swords are rarely associated with female figures due to their symbolic association with masculinity. In contrast, Lagertha's depiction as a warrior capable of wielding any type of weapon suggests a character who transcends conventional mythological gender boundaries. Lagertha is portrayed in *Gesta Danorum* as an exceptional warrior whose courage and combat skills rival those of male fighters. The narrative emphasizes that she fought on the front lines alongside the bravest warriors,

displaying remarkable strength and determination despite being identified as a woman by her long hair. Her military prowess astonished those around her, and Ragnar himself acknowledged that his victory was largely due to her energy and contribution in battle (Gay, 2016, pp. 142–143). This passage clearly emphasizes Lagertha's decisive role in Ragnar's victories. Rather than merely accompanying Ragnar on the battlefield, she emerges as a strategic ally who neutralizes threats encountered throughout the hero's journey. Her presence in Ragnar's campaigns illustrates her role as a form of heroic companion or *sidekick*, whose military courage and combat skills contribute significantly to Ragnar's success. The narrative also portrays Lagertha as a figure defined by autonomy and honour. When Ragnar brings Aslaug into his household, Lagertha leaves Kattegat with her son Bjorn, demonstrating that she is not a passive character but an agent who prioritizes her own dignity and independence. Yet this separation does not transform her into an adversary. The narrative repeatedly suggests that Lagertha refrains from forming alliances with Ragnar's enemies and continues to support him in moments of danger, thereby emphasizing her loyalty as well as her independence.

After settling in a new settlement, Lagertha first establishes a peaceful life before eventually defeating the local ruler and assuming the title of Earl. Her ability to forge weapons, organize encampments, command warriors, and participate in battle illustrates that gender roles in Viking society were not always rigidly divided but could overlap in significant ways. In this respect, Lagertha shares notable similarities with female figures in modern fantasy literature such as Éowyn, Galadriel, or Hermione Granger—characters who stand beside male heroes while simultaneously maintaining their own narrative agency. Ultimately, Lagertha embodies a dual model of female identity. On the one hand, she represents traditional virtues associated with motherhood and companionship; on the other, she offers an alternative model characterized by action, independence, and martial strength. Her role in the construction of Ragnar's legendary kingship suggests that she functions not merely as a supporting character but as a foundational force within the narrative. By protecting Ragnar at critical moments, preventing alliances with his enemies, and ensuring his survival during key conflicts, Lagertha emerges as one of the central figures shaping the progression of the heroic narrative.

The Status of Female Characters in Modern Epic Fiction: *The Lord of the Rings* Series

Myths and epic narratives have continued to resonate strongly in modern literature, particularly with the emergence of what is often described as the concept of the “modern myth.” The publication of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* significantly contributed to this development, transforming mythic narrative structures into a central element of twentieth-century literary discourse.

Although Tolkien himself could hardly have anticipated the global and lasting influence of his work, the narrative—set in a fictional past reminiscent of ancient mythic worlds—has come to be regarded as one of the most significant literary achievements of the twentieth century. Originally conceived as a sequel to *The Hobbit*, the work was written between 1937 and 1949, published in three volumes between 1954 and 1955, and subsequently translated into dozens of languages. Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories," delivered in 1939, provided the theoretical foundations for the mythopoetic universe he would later construct. The narrative employs a stylistically controlled and internally coherent language while depicting a world inhabited by hobbits, elves, humans, dwarves, and wizards, alongside antagonistic forces such as orcs and the Rings of Power forged by Sauron. The story begins with the distribution of twenty rings—nine to men, seven to dwarves, three to elves, and one retained by Sauron—and develops into the epic quest undertaken by the fellowship formed to destroy the One Ring. This struggle unfolds throughout *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*, ultimately culminating in Frodo's destruction of the ring and the collapse of Sauron's dominion. Despite the narrative's vast array of characters and races, the work has frequently been criticised for the limited presence of female figures. According to Skeparnides, female characters are often portrayed as figures who require male protection and who embody qualities of sublimity, purity, and chastity (Skeparnides, 2004). From a feminist critical perspective, Showalter argues that women function as a "subculture" within patriarchal societies and that literary representations frequently reproduce this marginal position (Showalter, 1977). Similarly, Winders contends that the authority of discourse largely remains within male structures of language and power, through which gender roles are culturally reproduced (Winders, 2011, p. 102–142). Within this theoretical framework, Tolkien's female characters may initially appear to conform to traditional gender roles; however, a closer analysis reveals that they perform crucial narrative functions that significantly influence the progression of the story. Arwen represents one of the most prominent examples of such influence. As the daughter of Elrond, Arwen embodies a lineage that unites both elven and human ancestry. Her beauty and resemblance to the legendary Lúthien are emphasised in the narrative; when Frodo encounters her, the narrator remarks that "it was said that Lúthien's face had been reborn in her" (Tolkien, 2001, p. 193). Arwen's narrative significance emerges primarily through her relationship with Aragorn. Elrond's declaration that his daughter may only marry the future King of Gondor and Arnor functions as a decisive turning point that motivates Aragorn's arduous journey toward kingship (Tolkien, 2001, p. 861). In this sense, Arwen is not merely a passive figure but a symbolic and motivational force shaping the hero's destiny. Moreover, the banner she prepares—bearing the White Tree of Gondor and the stars of Elendil—plays an important symbolic and political role when it is unfurled during the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, reinforcing the unity of the allied forces. The white crystal she

later gives to Frodo also possesses spiritual significance, alleviating his suffering and reminding him of the possibility of sailing westward (Tolkien, 2007, p. 1276). Although she remains largely in the background of the narrative, Arwen thus functions as a figure who structures the emotional and symbolic axis of the story. Another significant female character is Galadriel. As a princess of the Noldor with an illustrious lineage, Galadriel is portrayed in Tolkien's writings as both proud and ambitious in her youth; in Tolkien's letters she is even compared to an athletic "Amazon." Her intellectual strength and psychological resilience are particularly evident in her ability to resist Sauron's attempts to penetrate her mind: "I feel the Dark Lord and know his thoughts... But the door of achievement is closed" (Tolkien, 1999, p. 474). Galadriel is among the first characters to fully comprehend the immense difficulty of destroying the Ring and to articulate the necessity of resistance against Sauron. Her presence in Lothlórien creates an atmosphere of protection and stability, while Aragorn's defence of her against Boromir's suspicions demonstrates the respect and authority she commands (Tolkien, 2001, p. 304). The phial she gives to Frodo later enables Sam to dispel the darkness within Shelob's cave and escape the orc guards (Tolkien, 2001, p. 748–759). Through such interventions, Galadriel's role proves decisive at critical moments in the narrative. Although female characters in Tolkien's narrative appear relatively limited in number, their presence becomes crucial at key turning points in the plot. Arwen and Galadriel, while embodying traditional images of purity and nobility, simultaneously introduce an alternative representation of female power within modern mythic storytelling through their healing, guiding, and strategic roles. Their contributions illustrate how female figures—despite appearing to occupy marginal positions—can shape the moral and symbolic structure of the narrative. This dynamic becomes even clearer when examining Éowyn, whose character embodies a more overtly active form of female agency. As a member of the royal lineage of Rohan, Éowyn challenges conventional gender expectations by demanding the right to fight alongside men on the battlefield. Disguised as a warrior, she participates directly in combat and ultimately defeats the Witch-King of Angmar, Sauron's most powerful commander. This act not only demonstrates her personal courage but also directly alters the course of the war, disrupting the strategic order of Sauron's forces and preventing a potentially different outcome for the conflict. Through Éowyn, Tolkien presents a rare but powerful depiction of female heroism that transcends traditional gender limitations. When these characters are considered together, it becomes evident that Tolkien's female figures contribute to the narrative through diverse forms of influence. Galadriel provides wisdom, foresight, and magical protection; Arwen functions as a symbolic and motivational force that shapes the destiny of Aragorn; and Éowyn embodies direct martial agency on the battlefield. Their contributions also resonate with female figures in other epic and fantasy traditions. Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter series similarly supports the central quest through knowledge, magical skill, and strategic intelligence, while

Lagertha in Norse mythology assists Ragnar through military strength and tactical leadership. Consequently, female characters in epic and fantasy narratives frequently operate through both spiritual and tangible forms of power. Even when positioned in the narrative background, they often serve as decisive agents who influence the direction and outcome of events. The examples of Galadriel, Arwen, Éowyn, Hermione, and Lagertha demonstrate that women in mythic and fantasy traditions may shape heroic narratives not only through symbolic inspiration but also through intellectual, strategic, and martial contributions. In this sense, female figures in epic storytelling should not be understood as passive presences but rather as critical actors whose actions and influence shape the trajectory of the narrative itself.

The Status of Female Characters in Modern Fantasy Narratives: The *Harry Potter* Series

Rowling turned to writing during a period marked by significant personal and economic hardship, using literature as a means of intellectual refuge and creative expression. Her perseverance eventually culminated in the publication of her first major work, *Harry Potter*, which soon achieved international success. During the late 1980s, while working as a secretary, Rowling's longstanding passion for storytelling gradually evolved into a serious literary pursuit. Reflecting on her early ambitions, Rowling stated in an interview with Fraser: "I always wanted to write, but I never told anyone about this burning passion inside me. I wrote a book when I was six years old. Even at that age, I wanted to see it through to the end. At 26, I thought I had no chance of getting my work published" (Fraser, 2001, p. 12). According to Rowling, the initial idea for the *Harry Potter* series emerged during a train journey from Manchester to London. She later explained that the development of the wizarding universe—particularly the institutional and cultural structure of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry—required approximately five years of extensive planning and narrative preparation (Fraser, 2001, p. 24). The result was a richly constructed fictional world in which magical and non-magical realities intersect. The central protagonist of the series, Harry Potter, was born on 31 July 1980 in Godric's Hollow as the son of James and Lily Potter. As an infant, he lost both parents during Lord Voldemort's attack; however, Lily Potter's self-sacrifice invoked a powerful protective enchantment that shielded Harry from the Avada Kedavra killing curse. This protection not only allowed Harry to survive but also caused Voldemort to lose his corporeal power, inadvertently transferring part of his magical essence to the child. Consequently, Harry became famous in the wizarding world as the only known survivor of the killing curse. Orphaned at the age of one, he was placed by Albus Dumbledore under the care of his aunt Petunia Dursley. At the age of eleven, Harry discovers his magical identity and begins his education at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Sorted into Gryffindor House, he forms close friendships with Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. Throughout the series,

Harry's principal adversary is Draco Malfoy, while Dumbledore serves as his mentor and moral guide. Harry distinguishes himself through both his defensive abilities against the Dark Arts and his exceptional talent in Quidditch. Across the narrative progression of the seven novels, Harry confronts increasingly complex challenges: he protects the Philosopher's Stone in his first year, defeats the Basilisk in his second year, learns the truth about his godfather Sirius Black in his third year, witnesses Voldemort's resurrection after winning the Triwizard Tournament in his fourth year, leads resistance against authoritarian control through Dumbledore's Army in his fifth year, and begins the search for Horcruxes following Dumbledore's guidance in his sixth year, culminating in the final confrontation with Voldemort. The Harry Potter series is distinguished by its integration of fantastical elements, mysterious settings, and magical competitions, all of which contribute to its narrative dynamism. Beyond its imaginative world-building, the series demonstrates considerable literary richness through symbolic motifs, psychological depth, and cultural references. Rowling's narrative style combines humour, vivid imagery, and a fast-paced storytelling technique, producing immersive descriptions that capture readers' attention. The accessibility of Rowling's language and stylistic choices has allowed the series to reach a diverse readership across different age groups and cultural backgrounds. Within narratives where the magical and non-magical worlds coexist, Rowling synthesises traditional mythic motifs with contemporary storytelling techniques, presenting the familiar theme of a child endowed with extraordinary abilities who ultimately saves society from destruction (Isabelle, 2004, p. 85). Within the broader tradition of literary narratives, female heroes have historically appeared less frequently and often remain marginalised in terms of narrative influence. A similar pattern can partially be observed in the Harry Potter series; nevertheless, Rowling introduces several female characters who exercise significant agency within a predominantly male-centred heroic narrative. As Harry develops both physically and psychologically in response to the dangers he encounters, female characters increasingly gain narrative visibility, particularly in the later instalments of the series, thereby filling structural gaps that have historically characterised earlier literary traditions (Donaldson, 2009, p. 139–161). In this sense, Rowling reinterprets the conventional hero narrative from a modern perspective and constructs an intertextual balance by strengthening the narrative effectiveness of female characters. This diversity enhances the complexity of the fictional universe and enables readers to establish stronger emotional and intellectual connections with the characters. Nevertheless, some studies suggest that many female characters remain confined within stereotypical narrative roles and do not always exert a decisive influence on the central storyline. Among the female characters featured in the series are Ginny Weasley, Luna Lovegood, Nymphadora Tonks, Fleur Delacour, Cho Chang, Petunia Dursley, Narcissa Malfoy, Lily Potter, Molly Weasley, Bellatrix Lestrange, Minerva McGonagall, and Hermione Granger. Hermione Granger, in

particular, occupies a distinctive position within the narrative. Born to non-magical parents—both dentists—Hermione is introduced as a highly intelligent and academically gifted witch who becomes one of Harry Potter’s closest companions alongside Ron Weasley. Characterised by her unruly brown hair and determined personality, Hermione is described by Rowling as “sensible, honest and good.” Initially, she struggles to establish a harmonious relationship with Harry and Ron due to her tendency to demonstrate her extensive knowledge about Hogwarts and magical theory. However, after the trio survive a troll attack during their first year, their relationship evolves into a deep and enduring friendship. Hermione frequently functions as the intellectual and moral centre of the group. Her commitment to learning, respect for rules, and analytical mindset distinguish her as one of the most capable students at Hogwarts. Although she possesses recognisably human weaknesses, she remains a hardworking, vigilant, and well-intentioned figure. Throughout the series, Hermione repeatedly demonstrates her capacity to provide both practical solutions and emotional support during critical moments. She is granted the rare privilege of using a Time-Turner at the age of thirteen in order to attend multiple classes simultaneously (Rowling, 1999, p. 332). This magical device later enables her to assist Harry in rescuing Sirius Black from execution by travelling back in time (Rowling, 1999, p. 333). Hermione’s intellectual competence is further illustrated through her investigative abilities. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, she discovers that journalist Rita Skeeter is secretly an Animagus capable of transforming into an animal. By exposing this secret, Hermione prevents Skeeter from continuing to publish defamatory articles about Harry and Dumbledore, thereby protecting Harry from the damaging public perception created by the media (Rowling, 2000, p. 72). In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Hermione again demonstrates strategic leadership when she recognises the dangers posed by the Ministry of Magic’s decision to prohibit practical magic education at Hogwarts. Understanding that the students would be unable to defend themselves in the event of Voldemort’s return, she encourages Harry to establish Dumbledore’s Army, a clandestine group dedicated to learning defensive magic. Hermione emphasises the necessity of practical instruction, stating that theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient for survival in the approaching conflict (Rowling, 2003, p. 158). She ultimately persuades Harry to assume the role of instructor and leader of the group (Rowling, 2003, p. 159). Her contributions to the narrative also include the creation of enchanted Galleons that communicate meeting times to members of the group and the jinx that marks Marietta, the student who betrays Dumbledore’s Army. These actions reveal Hermione’s capacity for both strategic planning and decisive intervention. In later stages of the narrative, Hermione conducts extensive research on Horcruxes and prepares essential resources for the trio’s mission. Her foresight ensures that Harry and Ron possess the knowledge and equipment necessary to survive while hiding from Voldemort’s forces. Hermione’s importance is also evident in earlier instalments of the series.

In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, it is Hermione's determination and intellectual curiosity that allow the protagonists to uncover the secret of the Philosopher's Stone (Rowling, 1998, p. 158). She successfully solves the potion riddle guarding the Stone, enabling Harry to proceed further in the quest (Rowling, 1998, p. 205). Similarly, in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Hermione's research leads to the discovery that the monster haunting the school is a Basilisk (Rowling, 1998, p. 322). Although she is petrified before revealing the information directly, the clue she leaves behind allows Harry and Ron to reach the correct conclusion. Despite Harry Potter's central position within the narrative, the driving force of the story frequently emerges through the sacrifices and interventions of the female characters surrounding him. A notable example occurs in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, where Hermione erases her parents' memories and sends them to Australia to protect them from Voldemort's followers, thereby sacrificing her personal life in order to participate fully in the struggle against tyranny (Rowling, 2007, p. 97). This act illustrates that her actions are guided not merely by instinct but by conscious and strategic resistance. Throughout the narrative, Hermione repeatedly rescues Harry and Ron through her magical knowledge and participates directly in the destruction of Horcruxes. Even when subjected to torture by Bellatrix Lestrange, she refuses to abandon her resistance. Within this narrative universe, heroism is not a title granted indiscriminately. While Voldemort embodies oppression, fear, and the ideology of blood purity, Hermione—a Muggle-born witch—represents an alternative ethical framework grounded in equality, solidarity, and intellectual resilience. Her activism for the rights of house-elves and her decision to abandon academic ambitions in order to join a dangerous mission reveal a form of heroism that operates in the background yet remains foundational to the protagonist's success. The transformative influence of female characters is not limited to Hermione alone. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Narcissa Malfoy creates a decisive turning point by concealing from Voldemort the fact that Harry is still alive (Rowling, 2007, p. 759). Similarly, Lily Potter's earlier self-sacrifice establishes the protective magic that enables the prophecy to unfold. Consequently, within what initially appears to be a male-dominated war narrative, female figures repeatedly emerge as the agents who alter the course of events. A comparable narrative structure can also be observed in *The Lord of the Rings*. Éowyn's defeat of the Witch-king fulfils the prophecy that "no man could slay" him, while Arwen's decision to relinquish immortality deepens the moral dimension of the narrative through themes of love and sacrifice. Like Hermione, these figures function as transformative forces whose actions make the protagonist's ultimate victory possible.

Conclusion

Studies examining the epics and myths of different societies reveal striking similarities in narrative structures, character archetypes, and plot development.

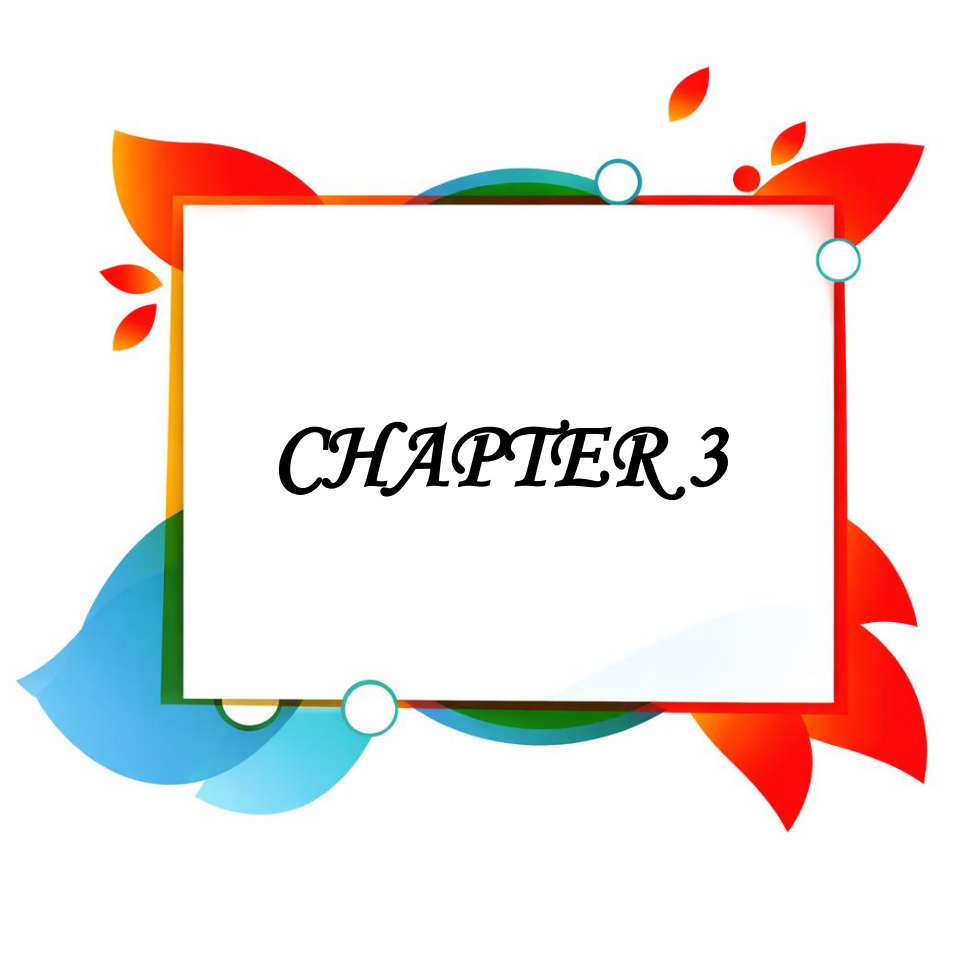
Despite geographical and cultural differences, the parallels between the legendary king figures of Norse mythology and the ruler types encountered in modern fictional narratives suggest that mythic storytelling often draws upon a shared cultural memory. Modern literary works inspired by ancient myths frequently maintain this continuity, particularly in terms of plot construction, spatial-temporal settings, and character development. Within this framework, the figure of Ragnar Lothbrok—one of the most prominent heroes of Norse mythology—appears as a central example of the epic hero archetype. Although Ragnar’s achievements are typically framed as the outcome of individual heroism, the narrative frequently reveals the decisive influence of Lagertha in shaping this heroic trajectory. Lagertha is not merely a character fulfilling the conventional role of a spouse; rather, she functions as an active agent who exposes conspiracies, disrupts enemy strategies, and directly participates in warfare when necessary. Even after her separation from Ragnar, she establishes an independent leadership while continuing to support him during critical moments. In this respect, Lagertha can be understood as an invisible yet structurally foundational element of the protagonist’s epic journey. A comparable narrative configuration can also be observed in modern fantasy literature. Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter series, together with Arwen, Galadriel, and Éowyn in *The Lord of the Rings*, demonstrate striking parallels with the role played by Lagertha. Although these female characters are not consistently positioned at the narrative center, they perform crucial functions in ensuring the survival and ultimate success of the male protagonists. Hermione’s intellectual competence and magical expertise repeatedly rescue Harry from life-threatening situations; Arwen’s sacrifices and strategic interventions reshape the narrative trajectory; Éowyn’s decisive action on the battlefield and Galadriel’s wisdom and guidance further illustrate the transformative presence of women within predominantly male-centered narrative universes. The motif of sacrifice emerges as a particularly significant thematic convergence across these narratives. Arwen’s renunciation of immortality, Lily Potter’s ultimate sacrifice to protect her son, and Lagertha’s willingness to risk her life for Ragnar all exemplify acts that decisively shape the narrative outcome. In addition to sacrifice, functions such as gathering allies, offering strategic counsel, and intervening at critical decision points reposition these characters beyond the category of passive supporters. Instead, they become structural pillars that sustain and redirect the narrative progression. All three narrative traditions have achieved global readership, have been translated into numerous languages, and have maintained their cultural relevance through various adaptations across different media. Despite their shared depiction of male-dominated worlds in which female characters appear quantitatively limited, such numerical marginalization does not imply narrative insignificance. On the contrary, female figures—often operating from the narrative margins—frequently function as pivotal agents who alter the direction of events and enable the completion of the protagonist’s epic journey. From this perspective, a strong intertextual

relationship can be identified between ancient mythological narratives and modern fantasy literature. The decisive roles attributed to female characters in epic storytelling demonstrate a remarkable continuity from mythic traditions to contemporary fictional works. Accordingly, this study seeks to contribute to the existing scholarship by demonstrating that female figures, who often appear underrepresented in epic journey narratives, in fact exert a critical influence on the development and resolution of the narrative structure. Furthermore, the study aims to establish a conceptual framework for future research exploring the narrative functions of female characters across mythological and modern literary texts.

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Adopting Culturally Responsive Teaching and Pedagogy in Our Global Society: Pre-Service Teacher Education and Emerging Trends*

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Culture is a dynamic, multifaceted construct encompassing shared values, collective understandings, traditions, and social practices that shape a society. The Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) defines culture as “the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society.” However, culture extends beyond visible traditions and observable practices. It also includes deeper cognitive, structural, and interpretive dimensions that influence how individuals perceive and make sense of the world. As Eagleton (2016, p. 1) explains:

CULTURE is an exceptionally complex word—the second or third most complex word in the English language, so it has been claimed—but four major senses of it stand out. It can mean (1) a body of artistic and intellectual work; (2) a process of spiritual and intellectual development; (3) the values, customs, beliefs and symbolic practices by which men and women live; or (4) a whole way of life.

Culture therefore represents not only artistic or intellectual expressions but also deeply embedded social relationships and ideological systems (Eagleton, 2016). Furthermore, it plays a crucial role in shaping individual identities while simultaneously influencing societal structures and norms (Eagleton, 2000). As an intrinsic aspect of human existence, culture is not something individuals consciously choose; rather, it functions as a lens through which people interpret their experiences and understand the world (Gay, 2013; Karataş, 2020). It affects perception and knowledge construction, extending beyond race and language to shape ways of knowing and interacting with the surrounding environment (Karataş & Oral, 2016). Culture ultimately defines patterns of thinking and

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frames what individuals perceive as possible (Burger, 2011; Hofstede, 1980; Vygotsky, 1978).

Among the numerous factors influencing personality development, culture occupies a central role. In addition to biological and social influences, cultural context shapes cognitive processes and determines how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others. Identity formation and behavioral expression are therefore deeply rooted in cultural environments (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Across disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, and education, culture has been conceptualized in various ways, each offering distinctive perspectives. Delgado Gaitan and Trueba (1991) describe culture as a continuously evolving system consisting of social values, cognitive patterns, behavioral norms, worldviews, and belief systems that guide individuals in interpreting both their own experiences and those of others. From this perspective, culture is learned rather than innate and is transmitted across generations as individuals navigate their social environments (Taylor & Sobel, 2011). Similarly, Nieto and Bode (2008) emphasize that culture is socially constructed and inclusive, suggesting that all individuals participate in cultural experiences. In line with this perspective, Hinkel (2001) argues that the culture into which individuals are socialized significantly shapes their identities and positions within society.

The relationship between culture and language becomes evident through linguistic expressions that reflect shared worldviews, ethical orientations, and social identities. Language embodies the ways communities think, interact, and interpret experiences (Byram et al., 1997; Hinkel, 2001; Kramsch, 2002). In essence, language reflects the worldview of its speakers and influences communication, meaning-making, and interaction within social and cultural contexts. Consequently, language cannot be effectively understood or taught without considering the cultural frameworks that shape its use (García & Wei, 2014).

The interaction between culture and education is particularly significant in language teaching, where language serves both as a communication tool and as a carrier of cultural identity. Hall (1976) and Hanley (1999) contributed to this understanding through the iceberg model of culture, which distinguishes between visible and invisible cultural elements. Hall (1976) introduced the “cultural iceberg model” to represent these dimensions. Observable elements such as dress, cuisine, and celebrations are easily recognized and frequently incorporated into language teaching, particularly in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts.

In contrast, invisible aspects of culture—such as values, beliefs, assumptions, and sociocultural norms—are more complex and challenging to examine.

Culture remains a fundamental component of language teaching and learning, enriching educational experiences and promoting global awareness among both learners and educators (Kumlu, 2023). Research indicates that cultural elements shape instructional practices and classroom interactions, influencing how learners engage with language (Ho, 2009; Mitchell & Myles, 2004). The interconnected nature of language and culture supports inclusive and dynamic learning environments where teachers and students function as socially responsible global participants (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Moran, 2001).

“Culture, like any other social or biological organism, is multidimensional and continually changing. It must be so to remain vital and functional for those who create it and for those it serves” (Gay, 2000, p. 10). Language therefore functions as a subtle yet powerful force shaping thought, beliefs, and behavior, which subsequently influence teaching and learning practices. Since education is inherently sociocultural, understanding how culture shapes human experience is essential for interpreting and influencing behavior effectively (Pai, 1990). As Spindler and Spindler (1994) explain:

Teachers carry into the classroom their personal cultural background. They perceive students, all of whom are cultural agents, with inevitable prejudice and preconception. Students likewise come to school with personal cultural backgrounds that influence their perceptions of teachers, other students, and the school itself. (p. xii)

The central role of culture in education is further emphasized by the idea that educational practices are inherently shaped by cultural influences. As Gay (2000, p. 8) asserts, “Culture is at the heart of all we do in the name of education, whether that is curriculum, instruction, administration, or performance assessment.” This perspective aligns closely with Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, which conceptualizes learning as a socially mediated process shaped by cultural interactions (Garcia, 1993). From this standpoint, education, language, and culture are inseparable, as knowledge is constructed through social interaction and cultural participation.

According to Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, learning occurs through collaborative experiences involving teachers, peers, and communities rather than through isolated individual processes. Cognitive development emerges through social engagement, where language functions as a bridge connecting thought and cultural meaning (Lantolf, 2000). This perspective highlights the importance of

integrating learners' sociocultural backgrounds into instructional practices to support meaningful learning experiences.

Expanding on this view, Kumaravadivelu (2006) emphasizes the significance of collaboration in foreign language classrooms, advocating for the incorporation of learners' diverse cultural knowledge into language learning environments. He underscores the long-standing role of culture in language education, stating that "Traditionally, culture teaching has been a core component of second language (L2) education, aiming to develop learners' awareness and empathy toward the target language community's culture" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 207).

Stern (1992), as cited in Kumaravadivelu (2006), further conceptualizes cultural instruction through three interconnected dimensions. The cognitive dimension focuses on understanding geographical knowledge and the cultural contributions of the target society, as well as differences in values, lifestyles, and attitudes. The affective dimension seeks to foster curiosity, interest, and empathy toward other cultures. Finally, the behavioral dimension aims to help learners interpret culturally meaningful behaviors and respond appropriately within different cultural contexts.

Despite its contributions, traditional culture teaching approaches often fail to fully address the complexity of cultural diversity in an increasingly globalized world. Kumaravadivelu (2006) argues that although traditional methods support sociocultural awareness, they fall short of developing the global cultural consciousness required for contemporary language learning environments. In response, both teachers and learners should be viewed as cultural informants whose cultural references enrich classroom learning and promote mutual understanding (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

In today's interconnected global context, language education must evolve to address emerging communication needs. Linguistic competence alone is no longer sufficient for effective communication. Instead, global competence requires an understanding of the cultural frameworks that shape language use, enabling learners to engage in cross-cultural communication with sensitivity and authenticity (Byram, 2012; Kumaravadivelu, 2007). Recent studies emphasize that integrating cultural knowledge into language education enhances empathy, adaptability, and communicative competence among learners (Ciampa & Reisboard, 2024; Li & Lin, 2024). Furthermore, embedding cultural contexts into language instruction supports the development of intercultural competence and global citizenship (Porto, 2009).

As classrooms become increasingly diverse and globalization continues to reshape educational environments, prospective English language teachers must

be prepared to work within multicultural settings. Consequently, incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy into language teaching is essential for fostering effective communication, critical thinking, and intercultural understanding (Byram, 2012; Caingcoy, 2023; Hu et al., 2020; Kumaravadivelu, 2007).

However, much of the existing research in Türkiye remains largely theoretical, focusing primarily on teachers' perceptions, attitudes, or self-efficacy beliefs rather than examining lived experiences or classroom practices. This gap is particularly evident in English Language Teaching (ELT), where practice-oriented research on culturally responsive pedagogy remains limited. Studies exploring how pre-service English teachers actively implement culturally responsive pedagogy in educational contexts are relatively scarce (Kumlu, 2023).

This lack of practice-based research highlights a significant gap in the literature, indicating limited understanding of how culturally responsive pedagogy is experienced, interpreted, and applied by future English teachers in Türkiye. Identifying this gap directly informed the purpose of the present study, which aims to contribute empirical insights into the practical application of culturally responsive pedagogy within English language teacher education.

Recognizing and incorporating students' home cultures into teaching and curriculum design is widely acknowledged as essential for promoting equity and inclusivity in education. A growing body of empirical research presents multiple theoretical frameworks emphasizing culturally responsive educational practices (Chang & Viesca, 2022; Guan & Sumanoy, 2023; Howard, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Among the most influential of these frameworks are the funds of knowledge approach (González et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992), multicultural education (Banks, 1993; Nieto, 1996; Nieto & Bode, 2008), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), and culturally proactive pedagogy (Garcia & O'Donnell-Allen, 2015).

Collectively, these frameworks provide complementary perspectives that guide educators in developing equitable, meaningful, and responsive learning environments for culturally diverse classrooms. For example, the funds of knowledge approach emphasizes that students bring valuable sociocultural knowledge and lived experiences into the classroom. When educators recognize and integrate these resources effectively, student engagement and academic success are enhanced (Moll et al., 1992).

Similarly, multicultural education promotes educational equity by advocating for inclusive curricula that reflect the realities and experiences of diverse learners (Banks, 2004; Nieto, 1996). By incorporating multiple cultural perspectives into

instructional approaches, multicultural education seeks to ensure representation and fairness within educational settings.

Building upon these perspectives, culturally relevant pedagogy emphasizes the importance of supporting academic achievement while simultaneously affirming students' cultural identities and promoting critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). More recently, culturally sustaining pedagogy, introduced by Paris (2012), highlights the importance of preserving and nurturing students' cultural and linguistic identities while fostering educational environments where these identities are continuously supported and celebrated.

In addition, culturally proactive pedagogy, proposed by Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen (2015), encourages educators to anticipate cultural dynamics within classrooms and address them proactively rather than responding reactively as challenges emerge. These frameworks collectively emphasize moving beyond deficit-based perspectives by valuing students' cultural experiences and recognizing diversity as a strength within educational contexts.

Although all these theoretical approaches advocate for culturally inclusive education, the present study specifically draws upon culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching as its conceptual foundation.

2.2.1. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive pedagogy is often described using a range of related concepts, including "culturally relevant," "culturally sensitive," "culturally congruent," "culturally reflective," "culturally mediated," "culturally contextualized," "synchronized," and "responsive" (Gay, 2000). This pedagogical perspective originates from Gloria Ladson-Billings's (1994) concept of culturally relevant pedagogy and was later systematized and expanded by Gay. Unlike deficit-oriented perspectives, culturally responsive pedagogy encourages educators to recognize students' cultural backgrounds as valuable assets that enhance meaningful learning.

This pedagogical approach reframes students' cultural experiences as essential resources for educational success. By incorporating learners' cultural knowledge into instructional practices, culturally responsive pedagogy aims to empower students academically, socially, and politically. Through this integration, learning becomes both intellectually stimulating and personally meaningful. Recognizing students' cultural heritages as valuable educational resources allows teachers to connect academic knowledge with students' sociocultural realities while embedding multicultural perspectives throughout the curriculum (Gay, 2000; Porto, 2009).

2.2.1.1. Descriptive Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Gay (2000, pp. 29–36) conceptualizes culturally responsive teaching through six major dimensions:

a. “Culturally responsive teaching is validating” (pp. 29–30)

Culturally responsive teaching acknowledges students’ diverse cultural backgrounds as meaningful and valuable components of learning. By affirming students’ cultural identities, this approach enhances students’ dignity and sense of belonging, creating an inclusive classroom environment where individuals feel respected and valued. Such validation encourages learners to view their cultural heritage as a strength that supports academic success (Çelik, 2020; Gay, 2010).

Culturally responsive teaching recognizes the cultural heritages of diverse ethnic groups as influential factors shaping students’ attitudes, values, and learning preferences, while also positioning these heritages as valuable content within formal education (Gay, 2000). This perspective creates continuity between students’ home environments and classroom experiences, making academic learning more meaningful and culturally relevant. To achieve this, instructional strategies are adapted to accommodate diverse learning styles. By integrating multicultural content and materials into the curriculum, culturally responsive teaching promotes mutual respect and intercultural understanding.

b. “Culturally responsive pedagogy is comprehensive” (pp. 30–31)

One distinguishing feature of culturally responsive teaching is its holistic understanding of education. This approach considers not only students’ intellectual development but also their social, emotional, and political growth (Au, 2009; Gay, 2013). Such a comprehensive perspective ensures that education supports students’ overall development rather than focusing solely on academic achievement.

By connecting classroom learning with real-world contexts, instruction becomes more engaging and meaningful (Hollins, 1996; Kumlu, 2023). As Gay (2000) explains:

... focuses on those elements of cultural socialization that mostly affect learning. It helps students clarify their ethnic values while correcting factual errors about different cultural heritages. In the process of accomplishing these goals, students are held accountable for knowing, thinking, questioning, analyzing, feeling, reflecting, sharing and acting. (p. 32)

c. “Culturally responsive pedagogy is multidimensional” (pp. 31–32)

Culturally responsive teaching integrates students’ cultural experiences while addressing stereotypes and biases within educational contexts (Sleeter, 2018). This approach extends beyond simply adding multicultural content to course materials. Instead, it embeds cultural perspectives across all aspects of education.

This includes “the curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student–teacher relationships, instructional techniques, and performance assessments” (Gay, 2000, p. 31). Through this multidimensional approach, the learning environment reflects students’ lived realities, enhancing engagement and motivation (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Porto, 2009; Vavrus, 2008).

d. “Culturally responsive teaching is empowering” (pp. 32–33)

Culturally responsive teaching fosters learning environments where students feel respected and valued, encouraging them to actively participate in their educational experiences. Within such supportive environments, learners are motivated to assume responsibility for their learning and engage more meaningfully in academic tasks (Levine & Tamburrino, 2024). As Gay (2000) notes, “Because culturally responsive teaching is empowering, it enables students to be better human beings and more successful learners” (p. 32).

Empowerment within culturally responsive teaching involves not only developing academic skills but also nurturing students’ confidence, motivation, and perseverance. Teachers encourage students to recognize their abilities and persist in learning until mastery is achieved. To support empowerment effectively, educators are expected to employ flexible instructional approaches, critically evaluate their teaching practices, and collaborate with colleagues in meaningful ways (Pasternak et al., 2023).

Teachers’ beliefs and attitudes play a critical role in empowering students from diverse cultural backgrounds. A comprehensive culturally responsive teaching framework encourages educators to engage in reflection and proactive action while considering cultural influences at individual, community, societal, and global levels (Phuntsog, 1998).

e. “Culturally responsible education is transformative” (pp. 33–34)

Culturally responsive teaching seeks to transform traditional educational practices that often marginalize students. Rather than reinforcing inequities, this approach promotes critical thinking and encourages students to examine social inequalities (Gay, 2000, 2013; Nieto & Bode, 2008). The combination of academic achievement and cultural affirmation strengthens students’ confidence

and sense of agency, enabling them to advocate for themselves and contribute to their communities (Banks, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Described by Gay (2000), “(...) culturally responsive pedagogy validates, facilitates, liberates and empowers ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities and academic success.” (p. 44). This transformative dimension promotes both personal and social development by encouraging students to become active participants in their learning and social environments.

f. “Culturally responsive teaching is emancipatory” (pp. 35–36)

Culturally responsive pedagogy extends beyond conventional teaching practices by encouraging alternative ways of knowing and learning. Through this process, students’ potential is released and nurtured (Gay, 2000; Gordon, 1993; Lipman, 1995). Teaching and learning practices incorporate the experiences and knowledge of diverse cultural communities, fostering students’ sense of identity and freedom.

This sense of freedom allows learners to focus more effectively on academic tasks while developing critical thinking, empathy, and global awareness. As a result, students gain clearer perspectives, improved interpersonal skills, and appreciation for diverse ways of knowing (Chapman, 1994; Hollins, 1996; Lee, 1993).

Culturally responsive pedagogy challenges the notion that traditional school knowledge is unquestionable. Exposure to diverse perspectives encourages students to critically examine social and historical contexts shaping human experiences (Gay, 2000). This framework emphasizes that knowledge is dynamic and continuously evolving rather than fixed or absolute.

Through this approach, students develop their voices, explore multiple perspectives, and become active participants in their own learning processes (Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990). As Gay (2000) explains, the development of knowledge and skills forms the basis of intellectual and cultural empowerment in culturally responsive teaching. This perspective also aligns with Freire’s (1980) assertion that critical consciousness and cultural freedom are interconnected components of human development.

Culturally responsive educators foster collaborative learning environments where students work collectively toward shared goals. In such classrooms, academic success is viewed as a collective achievement rather than a competitive process, encouraging cooperation and shared responsibility (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Phuntsog, 1998).

2.2.1.2. Descriptive Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Teachers

Culturally responsive pedagogy promotes students' academic success by recognizing and valuing their cultural identities within inclusive learning environments. However, realizing the full potential of culturally responsive teaching requires not only modifications in curriculum and classroom practices but also meaningful transformations in teacher development, accountability, and assessment practices (Gay, 2000).

According to Gay (2000), culturally responsive teachers demonstrate several essential characteristics. These educators:

- possess deep awareness and critical understanding of the value systems, educational traditions, historical experiences, and achievements of diverse ethnic groups
- demonstrate professional responsibility by rejecting deficit-oriented explanations for student failure and acknowledging systemic shortcomings in educational structures
- challenge dominant assumptions in education and question the notion that instructional practices are culturally neutral or universally applicable
- apply their understanding of cultural diversity in instructional practices and remain committed to promoting academic excellence for students who are underachieving

Similarly, Irvine and Armento (2001) describe culturally responsive teachers as educators who connect instructional content with students' prior knowledge, thereby making learning more engaging and meaningful. These teachers also maintain a strong belief that all students are capable of achieving academic and personal success. Furthermore, they intentionally select instructional materials that reflect students' diverse backgrounds, creating a classroom environment where learners feel represented and valued. By acknowledging students' experiences and perspectives, educators foster empathy, respect, and inclusivity. In addition, culturally responsive teachers encourage student agency by allowing learners to participate in curriculum decisions and actively shape their educational experiences.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) identify six essential characteristics necessary for culturally responsive educators to design meaningful learning experiences:

- Culturally responsive teachers understand that individuals perceive the world differently depending on cultural and social contexts. They recognize how

social inequalities influence students' experiences and use this awareness to create equitable learning environments.

- These educators view students' cultural and linguistic diversity as strengths rather than obstacles. They value each student's contributions as resources that enrich the learning environment.
- Culturally responsive teachers assume responsibility for promoting equity in education and seek to create inclusive learning environments where all students feel a sense of belonging.
- They recognize that learning is an active process built upon students' prior knowledge and experiences. Accordingly, they design instruction that connects new concepts to learners' existing cultural frameworks.
- These teachers invest time in understanding students' cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and communities, which strengthens teacher-student relationships and enhances learning opportunities.

Culturally responsive teachers also challenge students to expand beyond their comfort zones by designing lessons that connect with prior knowledge while encouraging exploration of new ideas. These educators move beyond traditional teaching approaches, cultivating learning communities that value and integrate students' diverse cultural experiences.

Rychly and Graves (2012) further emphasize that culturally responsive teachers:

- demonstrate genuine concern for students' academic success by maintaining high expectations while showing empathy toward learners' diverse experiences. They also reflect critically on their own cultural assumptions to avoid biases.
- possess knowledge about students' cultural backgrounds, values, and learning styles. Recognizing learning as a collaborative process, they tailor instructional strategies to meet diverse needs and integrate culturally relevant practices.
- engage in continuous professional growth by seeking opportunities to enhance their multicultural competence. Through strong relationships with students, they support both academic and personal development while promoting inclusivity and empathy.

Similarly, Aceves and Orosco (2014) highlight several characteristics of culturally responsive teachers. These educators:

- reflect on how their own cultural beliefs influence interactions with students and demonstrate respect for students' histories, values, and lifestyles
- integrate students' experiences into instructional practices, making learning more meaningful and engaging while promoting motivation and understanding
- demonstrate strong belief in students' abilities by designing challenging yet accessible learning activities
- encourage students to think critically, solve problems, and connect learning with real-life experiences while empowering them to recognize injustice and advocate for change
- promote collaboration through group activities, peer learning, and teamwork, while providing culturally sensitive feedback that supports students' growth and engagement

Brown (2017) similarly describes culturally responsive teachers as educators who value students' experiences and foster cultural competence. Drawing upon Gay's (2010) framework, Brown emphasizes that these educators go beyond academic instruction by encouraging critical reflection, promoting social awareness, and supporting students' engagement within their communities. This approach enables students to navigate and challenge social realities while recognizing their identities as valuable components of learning (Brown, 2017; Gay, 2010).

Sarıdaş and Nayir (2021) also identify key characteristics of culturally responsive educators, including:

- democratic attitudes and appreciation of diversity
- high expectations for students and consistent encouragement
- empathy and understanding of students' lived experiences
- commitment to continuous professional development
- caring and supportive attitudes toward learners
- absence of cultural bias and stereotypes, accompanied by empathy and universal human values (p. 372)

2.3. Türkiye as a Context of Diversity: Why Do We Need Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Pre-service Teacher Education?

Culturally responsive pedagogy enables educators to transform diversity from a perceived challenge into a valuable educational resource. By incorporating

students' cultural backgrounds into instruction, culturally responsive teaching promotes inclusive and equitable classroom environments (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994). This approach also bridges the gap between students' lived experiences and classroom learning, making education more meaningful and accessible (Kotluk & Kocakaya, 2018).

Such an approach is particularly relevant in Türkiye, where inclusive educational practices are increasingly necessary to support marginalized groups, including refugees, students with disabilities, and learners from diverse socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds. Cultural differences between rural and urban regions further highlight the need for culturally responsive educational practices. Türkiye's geographical and cultural position as a crossroads between continents has contributed to a society characterized by substantial ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity.

Throughout its history, Türkiye has hosted numerous civilizations, including the Hittites, Byzantines, and Ottomans, each leaving a lasting influence on the country's multicultural heritage (Kahraman Vangölü & Şahin Sak, 2022). Today, this diversity includes various ethnic communities such as Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Laz, Circassians, and Armenians (KONDA, 2006). These communities contribute diverse languages—including Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, and Laz—as well as different religious traditions, such as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism (Nayir & Sarıdaş, 2020).

The arrival of refugees, particularly from Syria, has further increased cultural diversity in Türkiye (Nayir & Sarıdaş, 2020). As of June 2025, Türkiye hosts over four million refugees, including 2,699,787 Syrians under temporary protection (Presidency of Migration Management, 2025). This demographic shift has significantly influenced the educational landscape. Among this population, more than 1.3 million Syrian refugees under the age of 18 are enrolled in Turkish schools (UNHCR, n.d.).

However, the integration of refugee students has also introduced several challenges. Language barriers, socioeconomic disadvantages, and cultural differences often hinder academic achievement and limit access to education for refugee-background students (Atalay et al., 2022; Boyacı, 2016; Göktuna Yaylacı et al., 2017).

Additionally, educational achievement gaps in Türkiye are influenced by factors such as geographic location, socioeconomic status, and home language. Students from rural areas or economically disadvantaged backgrounds often perform below their urban and more affluent peers (Aydın, 2012). Furthermore, the increasing number of refugee students and learners with special needs creates

additional demands on teachers, requiring flexible instructional approaches to address diverse learning needs (Kotluk & Kocakaya, 2018a).

These demographic and sociocultural changes, driven by globalization and migration, highlight the growing need for culturally responsive educators in Türkiye (Güzelergene, 2023; Kotluk & Kocakaya, 2020; Yılmaz & Lee, 2023). The multicultural composition of the country, teacher assignment practices, and educational inequality reports further emphasize the importance of culturally responsive education. Moreover, the principle articulated by Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, that “No individual in education can be sacrificed” (as cited in Kotluk & Kocakaya, 2018a; 2018b), reinforces the relevance of inclusive and equitable educational practices.

By integrating cultural knowledge into teaching practices, educators can bridge educational gaps and foster equitable learning environments (Kotluk & Kocakaya, 2018c). Culturally responsive pedagogy not only enhances academic engagement but also promotes social cohesion and equity (Nayır & Sarıdaş, 2020). When students’ cultural backgrounds are acknowledged and valued, classrooms become spaces where all learners can participate meaningfully and reach their full potential.

Achieving this goal requires teachers who are culturally aware and capable of integrating diversity into instructional practices. However, recent research suggests that many teachers feel insufficiently prepared to address culturally diverse classrooms (Kahraman Vangölü & Şahin Sak, 2022; Yılmaz & Lee, 2023).

One major challenge involves communication barriers resulting from the absence of a shared language, which makes it difficult to establish supportive relationships with students from refugee backgrounds (Ekin & Yetkin, 2021). Consequently, these students often face academic difficulties and increased risk of school dropout.

Another challenge emerges from the mismatch between teachers’ cultural perspectives and students’ lived experiences. This disconnect can limit academic success and prevent classrooms from becoming inclusive environments where all students feel valued (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Additionally, teachers who lack cultural awareness may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes and fail to build meaningful relationships with students, resulting in feelings of marginalization and reduced sense of belonging (Kotluk & Kocakaya, 2020).

Teachers may also struggle to implement effective culturally responsive strategies when relying solely on standardized curricula and traditional instructional approaches (Oltulugil, 2023). Such approaches are often insufficient

for addressing the linguistic, social, and emotional needs of refugee-background students (Ekin & Yetkin, 2021).

Although the need to support culturally diverse learners is increasing, many teachers still feel unprepared to meet these challenges effectively (Taneri & Özbek, 2023). Pre-service teachers, in particular, report difficulties in connecting instruction with students' cultural experiences, which negatively impacts both educational quality and student engagement (Yılmaz & Lee, 2023). Standardized, one-size-fits-all instructional approaches further intensify these challenges by overlooking classroom diversity and contributing to student disengagement (Bozkırılı et al., 2018; Kotluk & Kocakaya, 2020; Sarıdaş, 2023).

Teacher education programs in Türkiye therefore need to address this gap by equipping future educators with culturally responsive pedagogical knowledge and skills. When pre-service teachers are introduced to culturally responsive education during undergraduate training, they are better prepared to foster inclusive and supportive learning environments (Kumlu, 2023).

Culturally responsive teaching also enhances teachers' ability to reflect on personal biases, integrate students' cultural knowledge into instruction, and design differentiated learning experiences. This preparation is particularly important in Turkish public schools, where centralized curricula and uniform teaching approaches may limit responsiveness to diverse student needs (Oltulugil, 2023; Sarıdaş, 2023).

Furthermore, culturally responsive pedagogy strengthens pre-service English teachers' resilience and adaptability, which are essential competencies for working in multicultural environments (Kumlu, 2023). By promoting empathy, critical reflection, and intercultural competence, culturally responsive pedagogy empowers teachers to act as advocates for equity and social justice (Gay, 2010; Kumlu, 2023). Within this perspective, teacher education programs that integrate culturally responsive pedagogy position education as a means of fostering inclusivity, valuing diversity, and expanding opportunities for all learners to succeed.

In conclusion, given Türkiye's evolving multicultural landscape, integrating culturally responsive teaching into pre-service teacher education is essential for preparing future educators to work effectively in diverse classrooms (Güzelergene, 2023; Zorba, 2020). Such preparation addresses cultural disconnects, promotes equity, and fosters resilient and empathetic educators capable of supporting academic success in diverse learning environments (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Yılmaz & Lee, 2023).

2.4. Recent Research on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching, which originated from the multicultural education movement in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, emerged as a response to racial and cultural inequities in educational settings (Nieto, 2017). Over the past five decades, this pedagogical approach has evolved considerably. Early multicultural education efforts primarily focused on incorporating diverse cultural content into curricula, often emphasizing surface-level representations of diversity without addressing systemic inequities.

Over time, however, the focus shifted toward a more critical examination of power relations, social inequality, and educational equity. Gloria Ladson-Billings introduced culturally relevant pedagogy, while Geneva Gay further developed the concept of culturally responsive teaching, emphasizing alignment between instruction and students' cultural contexts (Nieto, 2017). Today, culturally responsive teaching represents a comprehensive educational philosophy centered on equity, belonging, and critical awareness of social realities. Research indicates that this approach positively affects students' academic achievement, motivation, self-confidence, and overall well-being (Gay, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Recent research highlights the importance of addressing teachers' implicit biases, implementing culturally responsive instructional practices, and fostering student-centered learning environments (Batchelor et al., 2019; Koubek & Wasta, 2023). Furthermore, studies demonstrate that integrating culturally responsive education into teacher preparation programs plays a crucial role in equipping pre-service teachers with the competencies necessary to teach effectively in diverse classrooms (Christ & Sharma, 2018; Idrus et al., 2023). As globalization and migration continue to diversify classrooms, these competencies become increasingly essential for fostering inclusive learning environments and recognizing cultural diversity as a valuable resource.

Culturally responsive education also promotes academic achievement, personal development, and social justice awareness by fostering inclusion and encouraging active student participation (Banks & McGee Banks, 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2004). Additionally, culturally responsive teaching enhances teachers' cultural awareness, enabling them to engage meaningfully with students from diverse backgrounds (Caingcoy, 2023).

Studies investigating the implementation of culturally responsive education in teacher preparation programs identify several effective strategies. For instance, Hu et al. (2020) examined a comprehensive field experience model grounded in constructivist learning theory. The model included classroom observations,

engagement with English language learners, community involvement, mentor interviews, and reflective practices. The findings indicated that these experiences improved post-graduate students' understanding of learners' cultural and linguistic contexts, strengthened positive attitudes, and enhanced their ability to design inclusive lesson plans. However, the study also emphasized the importance of carefully designing community-based experiences and highlighted the need for more holistic teacher education programs grounded in practical application.

Similarly, Koubek and Wasta (2023) explored reflective and experiential learning practices in a graduate TESOL program. In their study, six post-graduate students provided individual tutoring to learners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Participants developed deeper understanding of culturally responsive teaching and applied culturally responsive strategies such as integrating home languages and culturally relevant materials. These experiences later supported their ability to create inclusive classroom environments. Nevertheless, participants reported challenges in implementing culturally responsive strategies across different cultural contexts, emphasizing the importance of ongoing professional development and reflective practice.

Research examining culturally responsive teaching and teacher self-efficacy also highlights the need for targeted professional support. Cruz et al. (2019), using the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy framework, examined teachers' confidence in designing culturally responsive curricula, managing classrooms, and integrating cultural perspectives. While teachers expressed confidence in building relationships and establishing trust, they reported lower confidence in incorporating students' home languages and culturally relevant instructional content. The study recommended targeted professional development to strengthen these areas.

Sanczyk (2020) investigated how teacher agency supports the implementation of culturally responsive teaching among instructors working with adult English language learners. The findings indicated that teachers perceived themselves as flexible and reflective practitioners who gained valuable insights from students' diverse cultural backgrounds. However, they experienced challenges in fully implementing culturally responsive practices due to institutional constraints, rigid curricula, and limited resources. Despite these limitations, participants remained committed to supporting students' academic success and well-being, while emphasizing the importance of continuous professional development to enhance their effectiveness.

Research on culturally responsive pedagogy in Türkiye, particularly within pre-service teacher education, remains limited. Recent studies have primarily focused on developing measurement tools to assess teachers' cultural sensitivity and self-efficacy in culturally responsive classrooms (Karataş, 2020; Sarıdaş & Nayır, 2024). These instruments have been validated as reliable tools for evaluating teachers' cultural competence. Additionally, studies have identified key traits of culturally responsive teachers, including empathy, understanding students' backgrounds, and avoiding prejudice (Sarıdaş & Nayır, 2021).

However, research also highlights several challenges in implementing culturally responsive education in Türkiye. These challenges include insufficient knowledge about students' cultural backgrounds and systemic barriers within the education system (Soylu et al., 2020). To address these issues, scholars recommend incorporating cultural sensitivity into teacher education curricula, providing in-service training, and increasing awareness of culturally responsive practices (Sarıdaş & Nayır, 2021; Soylu et al., 2020; Soylu & Kaysılı, 2022).

Karataş and Oral (2015) conducted a case study examining teachers' perceptions of cultural sensitivity. The study involved 25 graduate-level teachers from various disciplines at a major university in southeastern Anatolia during the 2014–2015 academic year. Findings indicated that integrating cultural values into education supported cognitive, affective, and social development. However, teachers reported limited efficacy in implementing culturally responsive education due to insufficient training and curriculum constraints. These findings highlighted the need for systemic reform in teacher education programs.

Similarly, Uyar (2016) explored Turkish pre-service teachers' attitudes and preparedness for culturally diverse classrooms. Data collected from 141 pre-service teachers across four universities revealed that more than half of the participants held negative attitudes toward teaching in culturally diverse environments. Additionally, many participants indicated that their teacher education programs did not adequately prepare them for multicultural classrooms. These findings underscore the urgent need to strengthen intercultural competencies within teacher education programs in Türkiye.

Paksoy (2017) further examined this issue by focusing on in-service teachers working in multicultural districts of Ankara. Using a phenomenological research design, the study involved 15 teachers during the 2016–2017 academic year. While participants demonstrated conceptual understanding of multiculturalism and culturally responsive pedagogy, many reported difficulties in translating this knowledge into classroom practice. Limited professional training and insufficient

institutional support were cited as major challenges. The study emphasized the need for practice-based professional development opportunities.

Tuncel (2017) highlighted the role of reflective practice in developing cultural awareness. Conducted with 40 teacher candidates enrolled in a Communications and Human Relations course at Marmara University, the study demonstrated that experiential learning and structured reflection significantly improved cultural sensitivity. As participants' awareness increased, they began incorporating culturally responsive strategies into their teaching practices.

Karataş (2018) examined pre-service primary teachers' understanding of culturally responsive teaching, along with faculty members' perspectives on integrating cultural sensitivity into teacher education curricula. The study included 22 senior pre-service teachers and 23 faculty members. Findings revealed substantial gaps in preparing teacher candidates for culturally responsive education. Cultural responsiveness was rarely integrated into course syllabi, and faculty members demonstrated limited implementation of culturally responsive practices. These results emphasized the need for curriculum renewal and professional development.

Kotluk (2018) conducted a large-scale mixed-method study involving 1,302 teachers across seven Turkish provinces. Findings revealed that while many teachers recognized the importance of culturally responsive education, practical implementation remained limited due to insufficient training and systemic barriers. Challenges included classroom management difficulties, curriculum limitations, and lack of parental engagement. These findings reinforced the need for institutional support and professional development.

Ersoy (2019) examined the readiness of social studies teacher candidates for culturally responsive teaching by considering variables such as gender, age, academic level, language proficiency, and participation in exchange programs. The study, conducted with 394 participants using quantitative instruments, revealed that readiness for culturally responsive teaching was shaped by both individual characteristics and institutional factors. These findings highlighted the importance of strengthening teacher preparation programs by embedding cultural sensitivity and inclusive pedagogical approaches more comprehensively into teacher education curricula.

Karataş (2020) explored pre-service teachers' perspectives regarding the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy on teaching and learning outcomes. Findings indicated that culturally responsive pedagogy enhanced teachers' adaptability, sense of belonging, and professional growth. Students also benefited through increased engagement, stronger school connections, and improved

academic performance. These findings demonstrated that culturally responsive teaching contributes not only to classroom relationships but also to educational equity and student achievement.

Soylu and Kaysılı (2022) conducted a qualitative study involving 30 teachers and 10 administrators to examine culturally responsive practices in Turkish schools. Although participants acknowledged the importance of culturally responsive education, they reported limited knowledge, insufficient resources, and lack of implementation support. The findings emphasized the need for systemic reforms, including sustained professional development and institutional support.

Zorba (2020) investigated in-service English teachers' readiness for culturally responsive teaching through a mixed-method design. Quantitative data collected from 415 teachers and interviews with 12 participants indicated that readiness varied depending on teaching experience and professional background. Teachers with more experience and those trained in English language teaching programs demonstrated higher readiness levels. The study emphasized the need for practice-oriented and culture-focused coursework within ELT programs.

Sarıdaş and Nayır (2021) further identified key characteristics of culturally responsive teachers through a large-scale study involving 266 educators. The study highlighted qualities such as democratic attitudes, valuing diversity, empathy, patience, and inclusive perspectives. These findings contributed to defining professional competencies required for culturally responsive teaching.

In a subsequent study, Sarıdaş and Nayır (2022) examined the alignment between culturally responsive education and Türkiye's strategic education plans. Although cultural diversity was acknowledged in policy documents, the findings indicated that existing plans lacked comprehensive approaches addressing linguistic, socioeconomic, and disability-related diversity. The authors emphasized the need for systematic planning to promote equity and inclusivity.

Nayır and Sarıdaş (2022) investigated culturally responsive practices in teachers' classroom behaviors. Data collected from 155 teachers across 20 provinces revealed strong relationships between culturally responsive teaching and classroom creativity. These findings suggested that culturally responsive pedagogy supports both inclusion and innovation in educational settings.

Kahraman Vangölü and Şahin Sak (2022) conducted a meta-analysis of 27 studies examining culturally responsive education in Türkiye. The results indicated increasing research interest after 2015. Although most studies reported positive perceptions and outcomes, a significant gap remained between theoretical awareness and classroom implementation. The study emphasized the

need for systematic professional development and sustainable implementation strategies.

Kahraman Vangölü (2022) examined the effects of a culturally responsive education program on preschool children's readiness for primary education. The quasi-experimental study involving 30 children showed significant improvements in the experimental group. These findings highlighted the early benefits of culturally responsive pedagogy and recommended its integration across educational levels.

Güzelergene (2023) conducted an action research study involving secondary school teachers from multiple disciplines. The study included collaborative activities such as classroom observations and discussions focusing on cultural perspectives. Results indicated improvements in teachers' reflective practices, collaboration, and responsiveness to cultural diversity.

Kumlu (2023) examined the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy on pre-service English teachers. Conducted with 40 participants enrolled in a Language and Culture course, the findings indicated that culturally responsive content fostered inclusivity, adaptability, and open-mindedness. The study emphasized that culturally responsive pedagogy helps pre-service teachers build meaningful relationships with students and navigate diverse classroom environments effectively.

Taneri and Özbek (2023) explored university faculty members' approaches to culturally responsive pedagogy in response to increasing international student populations. Focus group interviews with six lecturers revealed that many participants lacked the necessary skills, resources, and institutional support to manage diverse classrooms effectively. These findings highlighted the need for professional development and institutional commitment.

Sarıdaş and Nayır (2024) developed and validated the Culturally Responsive School Culture scale to assess school environments in Türkiye. The study conceptualized culturally responsive school culture as one that promotes cultural competence, continuous professional growth, and appreciation of individual differences while maintaining universal values. Findings demonstrated positive outcomes, including increased teacher motivation, strengthened parental trust, and enhanced commitment to diversity among school leaders. These results supported the reliability and practical applicability of the scale for evaluating culturally responsive school environments.

Building on this work, Sarıdaş and Nayır (2025) later proposed a Model of Culturally Responsive School Culture involving administrators, teachers, parents, and students across the country. Drawing on feedback from nearly 1,000

educators, the model emphasized the interconnected roles of institutional structures, instructional practices, and leadership in fostering inclusive school environments. The model also outlined practical recommendations for school leaders to promote belonging, equity, and community engagement, offering both theoretical and practical guidance.

Barutcu et al. (2024) explored teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive education using Q methodology with 21 teachers across four provinces. Findings revealed that participants generally recognized the positive effects of culturally responsive teaching on students' cultural awareness. However, teachers expressed uncertainty about how to implement these practices effectively in classrooms. These results highlighted the need for practical examples and clearer implementation guidance.

Taken together, both international and national studies emphasize that culturally responsive teaching and culturally responsive pedagogy represent powerful approaches for promoting inclusive and equitable learning environments. When reflective and experience-based components are integrated into teacher education programs, future educators are more likely to develop the competencies required to support culturally and linguistically diverse learners (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Recent research conducted in Türkiye also supports this perspective. For instance, pre-service English teachers' engagement with culturally relevant pedagogy has been shown to increase empathy, resilience, and openness toward diversity in classrooms (Kumlu, 2023). These findings suggest that culturally responsive pedagogy contributes not only to professional growth but also to the development of socially responsive and equitable teaching practices.

Despite the growing recognition of culturally responsive pedagogy, the literature—particularly within the Turkish ELT context—remains limited in examining how these practices are implemented in real educational settings. Much of the existing research focuses on teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and self-reported competencies, providing limited insight into how pre-service English teachers experience and apply culturally responsive pedagogy in practice.

Given the culturally mediated nature of language education, addressing this gap requires a stronger emphasis on practice-oriented and experience-based research. This need directly informs the focus of the present study, which aims to explore how pre-service English language teachers experience and implement culturally responsive pedagogy within instructional contexts.

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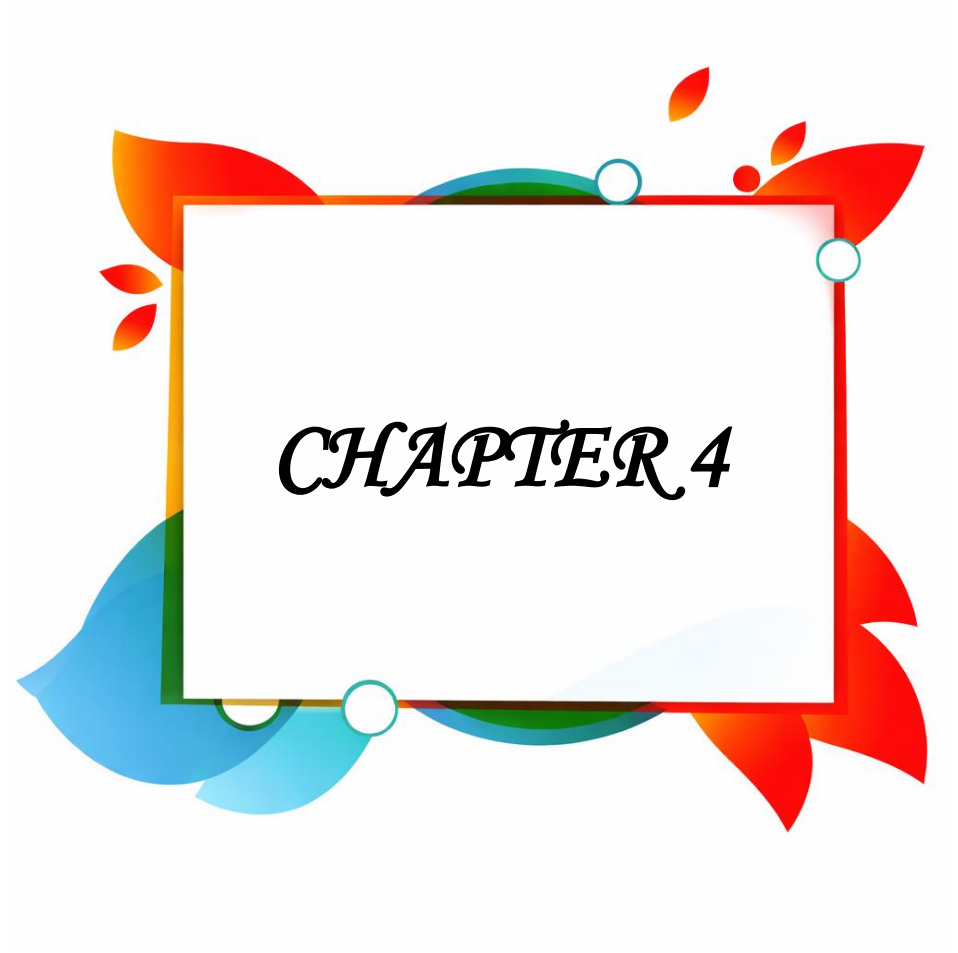
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Inclusive Education and Barrier-free University

*Müfit Şenel*¹

1.0. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Benefits and Challenges of Inclusive Education

Introduction Contemporary educational practices are evolving from a more traditional, deficit- focused approach toward inclusivity. There is a positive shift away from the preconception that students are the problem and that correcting what is perceived as “wrong” in them will automatically lead to better education for everyone. Calls to change our traditional educational practices require fostering a widespread mindset and ensuring that teachers are professionally knowledgeable and can utilize a wide variety of teaching strategies.

Two fundamental, interrelated areas that need to develop globally are increasingly complex strategies to meet the diverse learning needs of all students and practices that integrate all students into mainstream classrooms. Students will be best served by synthesizing the two strategies mentioned above. Inclusion—whether referred to as inclusive education or by any preferred term—is a complex, dynamic, and constantly evolving set of ideas. However, for the purposes of this article, “inclusion” is preferred because it signifies positive responses and approaches to diverse needs both within and outside our education sector. Inclusivity goes beyond simply including students with disabilities in regular public settings; it encompasses everyone: students of all cultural, racial, gender, economic, and ethnic backgrounds, and of all ability levels and learning styles. Most importantly, inclusive education emphasizes the need to appreciate and understand the reality that “we learn in different ways,” and suggests that attempting to teach all students in the same manner can sometimes limit their active participation in learning.

2. The Historical Background of Inclusive Education

The evolution of inclusive education spans a significant historical period rooted in the theoretical framework of child education. Long-standing beliefs have emphasized the importance of educating children in mainstream schools while considering various factors such as disability level, health issues, behavioral challenges, family dynamics, gender, and individual abilities (Cameron, 2024). These claims demonstrate that inclusion has been the dominant

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ideology in progressive, child-centered education for over a century (Algava, 2024). This approach emphasizes the idea that all children should be educated together, aiming for high-quality education for everyone and establishes inclusive education as an indispensable and fundamental component of the education system (Trouwborst, 2024). This perspective has been further supported by recent studies highlighting its importance (Li & Li, 2020; Dannesboe & Kjær, 2021). Furthermore, the evolution of inclusive education continues to adapt to modern challenges and social changes, thereby reinforcing its significance (Lu, 2023).

Significant historical shifts have occurred in the education of children with disabilities. During the era of segregation, some children were completely excluded from school, while others received education in separate institutions. By the mid-20th century, parents began to argue that segregation constituted discrimination against children with disabilities, even when based on levels of intelligence and educational ability. This article analyzes key movements of the 20th and 21st centuries, examining the achievements, failed initiatives, and potential barriers hindering the development of inclusive education.

1.2. Theoretical Frameworks in Inclusive Education

Over the past century, psychological theories have proliferated in the field of education and have provided numerous potential justifications for inclusive education practices. Contemporary educators have shown particular interest in three areas of psychological theory: constructivism, cognitive information processing theory, and emotional development. From a constructivist perspective, education is viewed as a deliberate, collective, and cultural effort aimed at helping students navigate a constantly changing, diverse, and uncertain world. From a social justice perspective, the value of a community and the effectiveness of its institutions—particularly schools and hospitals—are measured by social justice outcomes.

Inclusive education offers numerous benefits for academic and social progress, ranging from students with disabilities to those without, as well as for teachers and staff working in inclusive classrooms. Inclusive education is based on the idea that all children have the right to receive an education in their local schools alongside their peers, regardless of their cultural, economic, or intellectual differences. Advocates of inclusive education models believe that all students will benefit from being educated together. For example, teachers and staff in inclusive schools typically receive more professional development. Teachers working in environments with a higher concentration of students with special needs have the opportunity to learn the skills necessary to assist students with diverse learning needs. (Kauffman & Hornby, 2020; Materechera, 2020;

Kefallinou et al., 2020; Francisco et al., 2020; Akbarovna, 2022; Kramarczuk et al., 2021; DeMatthews et al., 2020) Some benefits of inclusive education make the inclusion of students with special needs in general education classrooms and general education settings more appealing. Students with learning disabilities who spend time in inclusive classrooms have been found to have higher average math and reading scores compared to those with learning disabilities who do not attend inclusive classrooms. Inclusive education can also benefit non-disabled peers. For example, students in inclusive settings learn to be more supportive and gain insight into the lives of others. It has been found that students with siblings with disabilities exhibit greater empathy toward people who are different from themselves. (Krämer et al. 2021; Schwartz et al. 2021; Dalgaard et al. 2022; Bellacicco & Parisi, 2024; Dell’Anna et al. 2022).

One of the most significant challenges of inclusive education is resource allocation. Effective inclusive education requires adequate funding, appropriate infrastructure, sufficient supplies, and staff. Unfortunately, many schools serving students with disabilities and diverse needs lack these resources. As a result, the quality of education provided to these students is often lower than that in mainstream schools. Furthermore, the quality of education in mainstream schools, which aim to educate all students together, may also be affected by this lack of resources. Attitudinal barriers are also significant. Stigma and misconceptions prevent members of the community and school communities from valuing the educational participation of students with different needs or disabilities. Teachers in resource-poor environments are often required to address diverse learning needs with little or no training. Therefore, another challenge is the need for a well-trained and supported teaching staff. Developing effective individualized education plans presents additional challenges. Creating plans based on each student’s assessed strengths and needs, and collaborating with students and families to set goals and determine appropriate supports, is complex and time-consuming. Finally, systemic changes are often necessary to meet the needs of all students. Education systems may lack the sufficient number of trained staff, supportive policies, curriculum flexibility, and assessment mechanisms required to provide quality education for every student. Inclusive education faces multiple and complex barriers. A systemic approach is necessary to properly identify and address these challenges. (Abou-Khalil et al. 2021; Karatay & Hegelheimer, 2021; Lee & Meadan, 2021; Kukulska-Hulme et al. 2023).

1.3. Inclusive Practices and Strategies

Teachers refer to various practices and strategies that ensure their educational experiences are inclusive. The answer to the “how” question—students’ approaches to teaching and learning—is a key consideration when thinking about

“effective” or “inclusive” instruction. Inclusive education requires approaches that address the varying needs across the classroom. Strategies may include collaborative learning, peer instruction, a differentiated instruction approach, or Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Support and develop students’ diverse abilities: Using differentiated instruction or UDL enables the teacher to provide instruction that meets the varied needs of different learners in the classroom. A supportive classroom environment: Embrace and value diversity in the classroom. Use strategies like “morning meetings” to foster a sense of belonging. Teach students social skills (e.g., working as a learning partner, friendship, and “positively catching others’ good behavior”). Active behavior management using evidence-based practices that include teaching rules, routines, and expectations across the classroom, as well as providing positive behavior interventions and supports: For example, school-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) may include proactive systems to identify, teach, and support appropriate behaviors and to recognize social-ethical behavior. Provide support by answering questions and helping manage classroom dynamics: Leverage the skills of teacher aides, learning assistants, child and youth workers, therapists, resource teachers, and other support staff and specialists. Seek backup support from the Learning Support Coordinator. Identify your needs for additional support and resources. (Griful-Freixenet et al. 2020) (Benford 2023) (Lambert et al. 2021) (Rao 2021) (Griful-Freixenet et al. 2021) (Onyishi & Sefotho, 2020) For example, roles such as the Learning Support Teacher, Classroom Release Teachers, and the Learning Support Coordinator oversee the provision of support that fosters collaboration and planning to ensure students with disabilities have access to content and can participate meaningfully. Use of cooperative learning: This is a powerful strategy that integrates students with disabilities into small groups with other students. Successful cooperative learning involves structured tasks that require and value students in leadership roles while ensuring that students with disabilities take on meaningful responsibilities within the group.

1.4. Collaboration and Partnerships in Inclusive Education

Supporting a diverse range of students in any educational setting requires collaboration among educators, specialists, and families. This type of teamwork and support is essential in all educational settings and is not unique to inclusive environments. Recognizing the need for collaborative support for all students is a fundamental guiding principle in achieving effective inclusive education. Educators recognize and value the expertise that any collaborative team brings. Rather than working alone, educators who collaborate with others can pool resources and ideas. When a collaborative approach is used for support, all students receive better services, resulting in more personalized support and

diverse educational experiences in their classrooms. Community partnerships have also been established among schools, higher education institutions, and nonprofit organizations. Schools can include a pediatrician, speech therapist, special education consultant, public health representatives, and a dietitian in health screening clinics for preschool children. The scope of these teams can be broad because they are not tied to specific geographic locations and can reach a wider demographic. It has been noted that these teams serve as a bridge between home and school, and that their assistance is part of a continuum of care. Open, honest, and respectful communication and agreement are important steps in advancing collaboration. To improve communication, both children and parents must feel safe expressing themselves and confident that their concerns are heard and their feedback is taken into account. This can involve a holistic team approach that includes the child, parents, teachers, teaching assistants, school administrators, and other support staff. Despite the idea of working collaboratively and involving all members of the educational team, there are challenges in establishing these partnerships. Unique communication challenges, time constraints, and differences in workload are some secondary issues. Successful collaboration initiatives are designed together by the relevant parties, are flexible and responsive to needs, and are grounded in relationships, shared values, goals, and a vision. There are examples that demonstrate the value of partnerships. In one such example, a group of high school science teachers and a Science Facilitator worked for 2 years to develop and provide new materials and assessment strategies that benefited students newly arrived in the country. These resources enabled both local and international students to learn the language of science and achieve greater success in science. (Kefallinou et al., 2020; DeMatthews et al., 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2022; Demchenko et al., 2021; Ainscow, 2020; Byrd & Alexander, 2020; Ainscow, 2020; Lindner & Schwab, 2020).

2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of inclusive education, which has gained prominence in recent years, is an approach that views differences in the classroom not as problems but as opportunities to enrich instruction. As noted, while the concept of inclusive education initially focused on integrating students with disabilities into regular classrooms, in recent years it has expanded to encompass social, cultural, and other forms of diversity (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Inclusive education is a process that ensures all children receive an education aligned with their developmental, sociocultural, and individual characteristics and needs. It focuses on enhancing children's access to quality education, increasing their participation, and reducing potential discrimination fundamental goals of inclusive education.

UNICEF (2017) defines inclusive education as an educational system that encompasses all students, embracing and supporting them in their learning regardless of who they are, their abilities, or their needs, and states that inclusive education means ensuring that teaching, curriculum, school buildings, classrooms, playgrounds, and transportation are suitable for all children at every level, and that all children learn together in the same schools (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/igo>) UNESCO (2003) has justified the necessity of inclusive education based on three fundamental pillars: economic, social, and educational (<https://www.unesco.org/en/inclusion-education/need-know>) These justifications are articulated by UNESCO (2003) as follows: As an educational justification, inclusive education implies the necessity of developing teaching methods that address individual differences and thus benefit all children by having all children learn together in schools; as a social justification, inclusive schools can change attitudes toward differences by educating all children together, thereby laying the foundation for a fair and non-discriminatory society that encourages people to live together in peace; and as an economic rationale: establishing and maintaining schools that educate all children together would be less costly than creating a complex system of schools specialized in the education of specific groups of children, and would be a more cost-effective way to provide education for everyone (Mel Ainscow, 2024).

When well-designed and effectively implemented, inclusive education can improve the learning outcomes of all students. When delivered effectively and sustainably with the consistent support of stakeholders, schools, and communities, high-quality inclusive education can provide short- and long-term benefits to all students. Including students with disabilities in inclusive settings can also lead to improvements in teaching that benefit all students. If inclusive education is implemented effectively, society can benefit in three key ways. According to UNESCO's report **Toward Inclusion and Equity in Education: Status, Trends, and Challenges**, inclusive education systems have educational, social, and economic justifications (https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf00003_80256).

Ünal and Yel (2019) define inclusive education as an educational service that ensures all disadvantaged students are educated alongside their non-disadvantaged peers under equal conditions. According to Stubbs (2008, p. 18), inclusive education is an expression of everyone's fundamental right to access education and not be excluded. Another definition of inclusive education was provided by Firat (2021). According to this definition, inclusive education is an educational approach that encompasses the processes implemented to ensure full participation and access, focusing on the need to provide quality education for all

students. Öner (2022), on the other hand, defines inclusive education as an educational system that embraces all children in the same environment regardless of gender, ethnic origin, religion, language, academic achievement, health, or economic status, and connects them with quality education by responding positively to individual differences.

Rakap and Kalkan (2019) note that inclusive education is discussed within the context of inclusive education and that it constitutes the final stage of the educational movement in which students with differences receive education alongside other students in the same environment. Sakız and Apak (2020) also address inclusive education from the perspective of migrant inclusion. Inclusive education remains a part of current educational discussions and practices, and the Ministry of National Education (MEB) in particular is undertaking various initiatives in this regard. Thanks to projects carried out with UNICEF, teachers' skills are aimed at modules being implemented (<https://oygm.meb.gov.tr/www/kapsayici-egitim-ogretmen-egitimi-modulu-projesi/icerik/1001>). It is reasonable to anticipate that the importance of inclusive education will continue to grow, as it increases general positive perceptions of education and fosters respect for differences.

According to Rakap and Kalkan (2019, p. 271), the concept of inclusive education has been reached through the knowledge and experiences gained from practices of normalization, integration, and inclusion. Inclusive education has expanded to include students with health, social, cultural, and educational differences (Demir Başaran, 2019). According to Aktekin (2017), inclusive education “envisages all learners receiving education alongside their peers in the schools of their choice, fully participating in school life, and the modification of educational policies, curricula, school culture, teaching practices, and learning environments to address learners' diverse learning needs.”

Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (2006) list the fundamental characteristics of inclusive education under six headings (cited in Gürgür, 2019, p. 11):

- a) Focused on students with special needs or disabilities,
- b) Aimed at ending exclusion,
- c) Addressing all groups at risk of exclusion (e.g., refugees, those with different languages and religions),
- d) Aiming for school development for everyone,
- e) An approach to organizing education that emphasizes quality education for all.

With these characteristics, inclusive education is an approach that prevents the exclusion of individuals from education and aims to develop every individual.

On the other hand, the “barrier-free university” refers to a university model designed to facilitate access to the educational process for students with disabilities and to eliminate barriers. The concept of a barrier-free university emphasizes that students with disabilities have equal access to their right to education, are provided with equal opportunities, and that barriers are removed. The concept of an accessible university refers to the structuring of higher education institutions in a way that allows all individuals to receive an education with equal opportunities. This approach encompasses a wide range of practices, from physical accessibility to academic support, and from social participation to psychological support. Accessible universities facilitate the social integration of individuals with disabilities, thereby embodying the principles of equality and justice in higher education ([https://www.infoldia.com/blog-detay-917280-Yurt-Disindaki- Universitelerde-Engelsiz-Kampusler-Incelemeler-ve-Ipuclari.html](https://www.infoldia.com/blog-detay-917280-Yurt-Disindaki-Universitelerde-Engelsiz-Kampusler-Incelemeler-ve-Ipuclari.html))

The importance of an accessible university stems from its indispensable role in creating equal opportunities and fostering coexistence within state systems grounded in democracy and the rule of law. The advancement of disability rights is also part of the accelerating changes in Turkey alongside its EU accession process. <https://kmu.edu.tr/engelsiz/sayfa/3410/tarihce--tanitim/tr>

Accessible universities implement various measures to provide physical, emotional, and social support to students with disabilities, which can be listed as follows: (<https://acikbilim.yok.gov.tr/handle/20.500.12812/436385>)

1. Accessibility for Students with Disabilities: Accessible universities make physical accommodations to ensure students with disabilities can easily access the campus and university buildings. These may include ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms.

2. Educational and Instructional Support: Special measures are taken to support students with disabilities during their educational journey. These may include specialized education programs, resource centers, assistive technology tools, and student mentoring. Appropriate methods and materials are used to ensure students with disabilities can participate in their courses.

3. Social and Emotional Support: Accessible universities offer various forms of support to address the social and emotional needs of students with disabilities. Efforts are made to encourage students’ participation in university life, facilitate their involvement in social activities, and provide counseling services and support groups.

4. Awareness and Education: Accessible universities organize various educational and informational activities to raise awareness about disability and educate the community. Efforts are made to foster sensitivity toward disability, break down prejudices, and cultivate a more understanding approach toward people with disabilities within society.

Access to the university begins with physically enabling students to move around the campus. A “barrier-free university” is an initiative aimed at making university facilities universally accessible to people with disabilities (<https://untoday.org/university-for-all-making-higher-education-more-inclusive/>). In her 2006 study titled “Promoting an ‘Accessible Built Environment’ in Universities,” Hazreena noted that the number of accessible design facilities provided on campus has decreased. Additionally, (Kamarulzaman), 2007, acknowledged that people with disabilities have the right to participate in society and that providing accessible facilities would help people with disabilities move around actively and interact better with others.

A campus is a prestigious place of teaching and learning that fosters innovation and ideas to expand and disseminate knowledge (Coulson, Roberts & Taylor, 2017). Therefore, a campus must be designed to provide a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere that makes the physical environment both enduring and dynamic, while ensuring equal opportunities for all individuals. In addition to fostering academic tradition, it is a place that must offer state-of-the-art teaching and learning facilities to benefit campus users from diverse backgrounds and help them thrive. This is essential to ensuring educational equity by addressing the specific needs of individuals, including those with disabilities. In other words, it is about ensuring that everyone’s learning needs are met based on the principles of equality in the allocation of resources, expectations, treatment, and success for every student (Vossoughi, Hooper & Escudé, 2016).

Ondokuz Mayıs University has made significant progress toward becoming both an inclusive education institution and a barrier-free university. To elevate Ondokuz Mayıs University—which received the third-place award at the 2020 YÖK Accessible University Awards—to higher levels in this field, the necessary efforts must be undertaken. Ondokuz Mayıs University’s (OMÜ) efforts toward becoming an accessible university are beginning to bear fruit. At the “Workshop on Accessible Horizons in Higher Education and the 2019 Accessible University Awards Ceremony” organized by the Presidency of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), OMÜ ranked Additionally, three units of OMÜ were also awarded the “Nominee for the Spatial Accessibility Flag” prize. Having received the third-place award in the 2020 YÖK Accessible University Awards, Ondokuz Mayıs University continues to take significant steps

toward advancing to higher levels in this field. Finally, Ondokuz Mayıs University (OMÜ), which has achieved significant success in creating an accessible education and living environment, was honored with 8 Orange Flags in the “Accessibility in Space” category at the “Accessible University Awards 2024,” bringing its total to 18. In this context, following discussions with Akademia Nauk Stosowanych Angelusa Silesiusa—our partner under the Erasmus program, which supports inclusive education and barrier-free university initiatives—ideas were exchanged, and the findings are outlined here.

3.0. METHOD

3.1. Participants

In forming the project’s working group, a non-random sampling method was employed. This method involves selecting the most accessible and nearby individuals as participants and continuing this process until an appropriate sample is reached (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Academics, students, and several staff members from the Faculty of Education at Ondokuz Mayıs University and the Angelus Silesius University of Applied Sciences participated in the study. Additionally, academics and students from the Faculty of Dentistry at Ondokuz Mayıs University as well. The total number of participants was 233. Detailed information about the participants is provided below.

Gender					
Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	GIRL	146	62.7	62.7	62.7
	MALE	87	37.3	37.3	100.0
	Total	233	100.0	100.0	

Departments					
Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ENGLISH	56	24.0	24.0	24.0
	GERMAN	29	12.4	12.4	36.5
	PRE SCHOOL TEACHING	48	20.6	20.6	57.1
	DENTISTRY	65	27.9	27.9	85.0
	Angelus Silesius University of Applied Sciences	35	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	233	100.0	100.0	

Staff					
Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STUDENT	192	82.4	82.4	82.4
	ACADEMIC	32	13.7	13.7	96.1
	STAFF	9	3.9	3.9	100.0
	Total	233	100.0	100.0	

Grade					
Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1st Grade	17	7.3	8.9	8.9
	2nd Grade	46	19.7	24.0	32.8
	3rd Grade	45	19.3	23.4	56.3
	4th Grade	84	36.1	43.8	100.0
	Total	192	82.4	100.0	
MissingSystem		41	17.6		
Total		233	100.0		

3.2. Method

Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used. In the first phase, information was provided to the academic and administrative staff of the partner institution regarding the work and practices carried out by our university during the phase of establishing inclusive education and an accessible university. Following these informational presentations, interviews were conducted at regular intervals with academic, administrative, and student staff on a voluntary basis to contribute to the project, and a 36-item scale was provided for them to complete. The same procedure was also carried out at Ondokuz Mayıs University (the Faculties of English Language Teaching, German Language Teaching, and French Language Teaching, Preschool Teaching, and the Faculty of Dentistry).

3.3. Data collection tools

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools were used. Participants were first given a 36-item, 5-point Likert-type scale on the topic of “inclusive education and barrier-free university,” adapted by Demirkol and Kuşça (2023), and asked to complete it. The scale does not contain reverse items or subscales. After completing the scale, participants were given an interview form containing 10 open-ended questions prepared by the researchers. Completing the scale and interview. took approximately 30–35 minutes to complete. The scale and interview form are provided in Appendix 1.

3.4.Data Analysis

The interview data from open-ended questions were coded using content analysis, while the quantitative data were analyzed and evaluated in SPSS v25.

4.0. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Quantitative Data

First, the results of the One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) conducted to determine whether there were any statistical differences among participants who provided support for adaptation, by gender, department, staff status, and grade level, are presented below.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender	Between Groups	11,883	39	,305	1,403	,076
	Within Groups	35,407	163	,217		
	Total	47,291	202			
section	Between Groups	137,282	39	3,520	,987	,500
	Within Groups	581,398	163	3,567		
	Total	718,680	202			
staff	Between Groups	9,489	39	,243	,859	,706
	Within Groups	46,195	163	,283		
	Total	55,685	202			
class	Between Groups	30,108	38	,792	,869	,685
	Within Groups	112,170	123	,912		
	Total	142,278	161			

As shown in the table above, no statistically significant differences were observed among participants based on their scale total scores for any independent variable (gender, .sig = .076, $p > .05$; department, .sig = .500, $p > .05$; staff, .sig = .706, $p < .05$; grade .sig = .685, $p > .05$). These results indicate that there are no differences in the perspectives of participants from both institutions regarding barrier-free universities and inclusive education.

When examining the participants' mean scale scores, their responses were found to be ± 3.5205 , which, according to the evaluation criteria for 5-point Likert-type scales (strongly disagree ± 1.00 – 1.80 ; disagree ± 1.81 – 2.60 ; undecided ± 2.61 – 3.40 ; agree ± 3.41 – 4.20 ; strongly agree, ± 4.21 – 5.00), indicates that the vast majority of participants view the concepts of inclusive education and barrier-free universities positively, and that they largely agree with and support issues such as the promotion of inclusive education and barrier-free universities, increased investment, and the updating of educational curricula in this context.

4.2. Qualitative Data

This section includes some of the responses provided by participants from Ondokuz Mayıs University and the Angelus Silesius University of Applied Sciences to the interview questions.

4.2.1. Examples of Answers Provided by Participants from Ondokuz Mayıs University

Question 1: Could you briefly explain the concepts of inclusive education and barrier-free universities?

The answers provided by both female and male students generally defined inclusive education as ensuring that all individuals have equal opportunities in education, while barrier-free universities were defined as institutions that provide opportunities and rights to facilitate the lives of individuals with various disabilities. It was emphasized that inclusive education is an education that should be provided to people without regard to gender. It was also stated that everyone has an equal right to learn.

Question 2: What challenges do students with disabilities or special needs face during their adaptation process to the university environment? Could you provide one or two examples?

Female students focused on physical challenges present in traditional classroom settings, such as insufficient elevators and the lack of guide paths. *Male students*, on the other hand, highlighted the socialization issues faced by students with disabilities or special needs and the inadequacy of physical conditions in the university environment. Issues such as social exclusion and transportation problems were mentioned.

Question 3: What types of physical or digital infrastructure improvements are necessary in universities for inclusive education?

Female students emphasized that physical conditions for individuals with disabilities are inadequate, noting that physical or digital infrastructure must be established as a current system always ready to meet the needs of these individuals. *Male students*, on the other hand, stressed the necessity of an infrastructure that is prepared to meet all the needs of individuals with disabilities and minimizes digital inadequacies. They also stated that audio alert systems should be utilized. It was noted that adapting course materials to be accessible for individuals with disabilities is important.

Question 4: Do teachers, academic staff, and other student groups play any role in inclusive education? If so, please provide one or two examples of these roles.

Female students noted that teachers play a significant role in this regard and justified the importance of teachers in this matter by stating that they must prevent students from being isolated from their peers. *Male students* also emphasized that teachers play a significant role in this regard, explaining that this importance

lies in teachers' ability to integrate students with disabilities or special needs into the classroom and prevent their isolation. It was also emphasized that academic staff should consider the possibility of having a student with disabilities or special needs in their classes.

Question 5: How can specialized support services (counseling, psychological support, academic advising, etc.) for individuals with disabilities or special needs be provided more effectively at universities?

Female students noted that specialized support services for these individuals can be effectively provided in universities through technology (such as email notifications and announcements on websites), individual follow-up, and addressing the specific needs of these students. *Male students* similarly noted that specialized support services for individuals with disabilities or special needs could be more effective through services tailored to their individual needs and regular meetings. Additionally, there is a general consensus that greater emphasis should be placed on initiatives such as psychological counseling, academic guidance, appropriate course schedules and content, and awareness training.

Question 6: Are inclusive education policies and practices sufficiently implemented at your university/faculty? If your answer is YES, could you provide one or two examples of these practices?

While some *female* students believe these practices are sufficiently implemented, others state they are unaware of them or that they are not adequately implemented. Those who believe they are implemented have described these practices as the provision of various physical accommodations (such as smart ramps and wheelchair-accessible elevators) and the seamless integration of these individuals into inclusive education. While some *male* students said these inclusive policies are not adequately implemented, others said they are adequate. Male students who believe they are adequate explained this adequacy in terms of the suitability of physical facilities and the support provided by academic staff.

Question 7: Can student organizations play an effective role in improving the university experience for students with disabilities or special needs? If your answer is YES, could you provide one or two examples of what they could do?

Female students generally indicated that student organizations could be effective in this regard. For example, they explained the importance of student organizations in this context by citing activities such as regularly organizing various activities and adopting an approach focused on students' issues. *Male students* noted that student organizations have an impact on improving the

experience of these students, and they have attributed these effects to factors such as assigning students with special needs or disabilities appropriate roles in clubs and providing suitable environments.

Question 8: What kind of impact could a vision of an accessible university have on society as a whole? What changes could inclusive education bring to society as a whole?

Female students noted that this vision would have an impact by motivating students with disabilities or special needs and changing society's perspective, and they emphasized that they believed this would lead to a more democratic environment. *Male students*, on the other hand, noted that an accessible university has a significant impact on integrating individuals with special needs into society and believed that changes such as serving not just the individual but also the community can be achieved through inclusive education. It was stated that a university with such a vision would have positive repercussions in society.

Question 9: Do you think your university and faculty are sufficient in providing all necessary opportunities for individuals with disabilities or special needs?

Female students generally indicated that they believe the university and faculty are not fully adequate in providing these opportunities to individuals with special needs. While some *male* students believe these services are adequate, others stated that they believe the university and faculty are not sufficient in this regard. It was also noted that the campus is not suitable for wheelchair users. They have also expressed that some laboratories and classrooms need to be made more accessible for individuals with disabilities. The general consensus is that while physical facilities on campus appear sufficient overall, they have not been fully realized. In some faculties, elevators are not suitable or easy to use, and the tactile paving strips for the visually impaired are broken in places, indicating that campus accessibility is insufficient.

10. Could you offer a few suggestions for improving universities in terms of inclusive education and accessibility, or what else could be done?

Female students have suggested raising awareness among university staff, establishing and expanding barrier-free universities, and providing necessary training to individuals on this matter. *Male students*, on the other hand, have suggested improving physical facilities on campus, increasing public awareness of this issue, and providing online education opportunities for individuals with special needs. Students have also expressed a desire for awareness-raising training sessions and informational meetings to be organized.

4.2.2. Examples of Responses Provided by Participants from the Angelus Silesius University of Applied Sciences

Question 1: Could you briefly explain the concepts of inclusive education and barrier-free universities?

I associate them with a university that is free of barriers, understanding, empathetic, open-minded, and committed to diversity and learning. “Inclusive education” and “barrier-free university” are not just slogans; they are obligations for university administration and, at the same time, a challenge.

These concepts refer to implementing improvements and solutions to ensure that students with disabilities have the opportunity to learn alongside other students and to facilitate their learning.

For me, inclusive education is an educational system where every student—regardless of their abilities, background, or individual needs—has equal opportunities for learning and growth. This is not merely a matter of physical access to buildings; more importantly, it involves creating an environment where everyone feels welcomed, respected, and supported. This means that teaching methods, materials, and assessment approaches must be adapted to accommodate different learning styles and needs.

Question 2: What challenges do students with disabilities or special needs face during their adaptation process to the university environment? Could you provide one or two examples?

Students with disabilities have the right to participate in classes and take exams according to their individual plans. The university provides individual education plans and support services (such as scholarships, teaching assistants, and academic support). However, due to the historic nature of the campus buildings, architectural barriers still exist, making it difficult to fully meet their needs.

This is a difficult question because disability varies, and the challenges encountered depend on that. For example, students with physical disabilities may have difficulty getting from point A to point B and may sometimes need help from others. Students with visual impairments, on the other hand, need support in reading the information necessary for their educational processes. We must not forget students with intellectual disabilities; these students may feel uncomfortable at the university or exhibit unconventional reactions, and they should be approached with sensitivity.

The greatest challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in academia stem primarily from infrastructure barriers that still exist. These barriers—both

physical and digital—are generally not the result of malicious intent on the part of universities but are linked to insufficient funding allocated to higher education.

In terms of physical barriers, it is common for universities to have to rely on externally funded projects. However, securing such funding is not guaranteed and depends on the quality of the proposed project or revision. The situation is similar regarding digital barriers arising from the increasing digitization of higher education—these too are frequently caused by insufficient funding.

Another category of challenges involves socio-psychological barriers. These include acceptance issues stemming from those around them (other students, peers) and, at times, the student with a disability's own reluctance to accept their condition. However, such barriers are, by their nature, easier to overcome. Activities in this area focus on raising awareness within the academic community and building the self-confidence of students with disabilities.

Question 3: What types of physical or digital infrastructure improvements are necessary in universities for inclusive education?

Physical infrastructure must be adapted to the needs of individuals with limited mobility; digital infrastructure must be adapted to the needs of students and staff with visual and hearing impairments.

Induction loops, stair-climbing devices, elevators, Braille labels and signs, and websites and social media platforms compliant with WCAG standards.

For universities to truly become inclusive, significant improvements are needed in both physical and digital infrastructure. This is the key to creating an environment where every student can fully realize their potential.

In terms of physical infrastructure, all buildings—whether new or undergoing modernization—must be designed with universal access in mind. This includes installing elevators and ramps that provide access to all floors, as well as automatic doors that facilitate free movement. Accessible restrooms equipped with wide, grab bars and appropriate fixtures are also mandatory. Braille signage and tactile guidance paths are necessary to help visually impaired individuals navigate the space easily. Classrooms and laboratories must be arranged to allow for free movement; adapted workspaces and appropriate lighting must be provided. Furniture should be flexible; for example, height-adjustable desks. Laboratory equipment must also be adapted for use by individuals with various disabilities. Induction loops must be installed in auditoriums and classrooms for those who use hearing aids. Throughout the campus, bright, clear, and accessible directional signs using contrasting colors, large text, and pictograms must be provided; this ensures that all users can easily navigate the space.

In terms of digital infrastructure, all university resources—from websites and recruitment systems to e-learning platforms like Moodle or Blackboard and student portals—must comply with international standards, including the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). This will ensure accessibility for individuals using assistive technologies such as screen readers. Additionally, all instructional materials provided to students must be in an accessible format.

This means that PDF files must include text recognition (OCR); e-books and text documents must allow users to adjust features such as font size and contrast, and must be machine-readable. Video and audio materials must include written transcripts, audio descriptions, and captions. Alternative descriptions (alt text) must be provided for all images; this ensures that visual content is made accessible to people with visual impairments. Universities should also invest in software that supports accessibility, such as screen readers, text magnification programs, speech synthesizers, or dictation tools. Providing regular training to teaching and administrative staff on creating accessible digital content and effectively using accessible tools is also critical for maintaining a high level of accessibility in the long term.

Question 4: Do teachers, academic staff, and other student groups play any role in inclusive education? If so, please provide one or two examples of these roles.

Yes, the representative responsible for students with disabilities at the university administration is also a faculty member. They play an important role in inclusive education; they help overcome barriers and offer practical solutions.

Yes, they must assist students with disabilities when needed. Additionally, if they identify a problem that needs to be addressed, they should report it to university administration (the rector, vice rector, general secretary, etc.) and ensure that appropriate improvements are made.

University faculty members are at the heart of inclusive education. Adapting programs to meet students' diverse needs, and modifying materials, methods, and strategies, falls directly under their responsibility. Faculty members create a warm learning environment where diversity is valued and a sense of belonging and acceptance is fostered. They also use personalized approaches that recognize each student's strengths and areas of difficulty; provide appropriate support; and facilitate access to specialized support when needed.

Academic administration also plays a crucial role in inclusive education; an approach focused on serving students, addressing their concerns, and helping to find solutions strengthens the sense of belonging and provides students with a sense of stability and security. All of these factors together contribute to the belief

that the university is almost like a “second home” for students; this is also related to the extended time students spend on campus.

Although the role of peers is often underestimated, it is of the utmost importance. Through mutual respect, openness, and understanding, peers help build a classroom community where everyone feels safe and accepted. Through group work, by helping one another with challenging topics, or simply by being a good companion, they can support one another in daily learning and life situations. Interacting with peers with different needs and abilities fosters empathy, tolerance, and communication skills, which are key to building an inclusive society.

Question 5: How can specialized support services (counseling, psychological support, academic advising, etc.) for individuals with disabilities or special needs be provided more effectively at universities?

With the support of financial resources such as European Union projects, counseling, psychological support, and academic guidance services for individuals with disabilities can be developed.

Universities should increase awareness of psychologist or counselor services among students with disabilities. Some students may not be aware of these services. Additionally, special support services should maintain constant communication with university administration and provide recommendations for improvements that will make students' lives easier, based on consultations with students.

Effectively supporting students with disabilities in universities requires establishing a comprehensive care system. The creation of an integrated counseling center that provides psychological, academic, and career counseling, as well as technical support, is critical.

In addition, various workshop activities and therapeutic events—such as art therapy, psychosocial skills workshops, thematic support groups, and mindfulness-based classes— should be organized. Such activities strengthen students' sense of community, foster solidarity, and support personal development.

Furthermore, raising awareness across the academic community is of the utmost importance. This includes training programs for faculty and administrative staff, awareness campaigns, and mentoring programs that promote inclusivity, respect, and mutual understanding. Implementing these measures will help provide personalized support for students with disabilities, facilitate their academic development, and generally improve their adaptation processes.

Question 6: Are inclusive education policies and practices sufficiently implemented at your university/faculty? If your answer is YES, could you provide one or two examples of these practices?

Based on my observations, the implementation of inclusive education policies has not yet developed sufficiently. Mechanisms to identify the needs of individuals with disabilities are lacking; this makes it difficult to implement the policies effectively.

Inclusive education policies and practices are becoming increasingly established in universities. Universities are aware that this is a necessity, and these policies are also mandated by the Ministry (which monitors implementation during inspection visits) and the European Union (for example, under the Erasmus+ program). Of course, there is always room for improvement.

Indeed, there are universities that are leading the way in inclusive education. These institutions provide comprehensive support for all students and create an atmosphere that they have established dedicated offices for students with disabilities, hired trained staff, and have sufficient resources.

In contrast, many universities still face significant challenges, including insufficient funding, a lack of awareness among academic staff, and inadequate infrastructure. In such cases, implementing even the most basic forms of support requires considerable effort and, often, additional financial resources.

Question 7: Can student organizations play an effective role in improving the university experience for students with disabilities or special needs? If your answer is YES, could you provide one or two examples of what they could do?

Student organizations can play a significant role by raising awareness, organizing events, advocating for change, collaborating with students with disabilities, and providing accessible educational materials.

Student organizations can encourage students with disabilities to more frequently voice their needs, enabling the university to implement necessary changes. They can also educate other students on the importance of supporting their peers with disabilities and understanding the challenges they face.

Student organizations can play a key role in creating a more inclusive and supportive campus environment. At the core of this role lies organizing awareness campaigns that promote diversity and empathy and aim to break down stereotypes.

Peer support and mentoring are also crucial components of this process.

Students can help one another adapt to university life through both in-person and online support groups. Furthermore, student organizations can play an active role in social integration by organizing accessible events and encouraging participation in student clubs.

Furthermore, advocating for and representing the interests of students with disabilities is of great importance. Student councils can effectively advocate for changes in university policies, making infrastructure more accessible, or implementing curriculum adaptations. Finally, the involvement of student communities in this process contributes to the development of positive attitudes within the academic community, fostering tolerance, acceptance, and a sense of responsibility.

Question 8: What kind of impact could a vision of an accessible university have on society as a whole? What changes could inclusive education bring to society as a whole?

A vision of an accessible university can transform society by fostering awareness and understanding. Inclusive education can help people become more open to one another, more understanding, and more positive in their professional and educational lives.

A vision of an accessible university serves as an example for society as a whole. It shows people that including individuals with disabilities in their daily lives, work, and other activities is nothing to fear. When their needs are respected and adequate support is provided, individuals with disabilities can become an important part of society.

A vision of an accessible university has a significant impact on society as a whole. This vision acts as a powerful catalyst for social transformation. Above all, it changes perceptions regarding people with disabilities; it moves them from the position of “individuals in need of care” to full members of society, thereby helping to eliminate mental barriers.

Inclusive education fosters increased social awareness and sensitivity among students and staff. This awareness extends to individuals’ professional and personal lives, shaping employment policies and broader societal attitudes. An accessible university also promotes the development of innovations and technologies—such as assistive solutions or universal design—that can be applied across all segments of society.

Increased access to higher education reduces people with disabilities' reliance on social assistance by enabling greater economic and social participation, thereby enriching society. Finally, this vision can contribute to creating more

inclusive legislation across many areas of life by driving changes in law and public policy. An accessible university is a forward-looking investment that benefits the entire community.

Question 9: Do you think your university and faculty are sufficient in providing all necessary opportunities for individuals with disabilities or special needs?

I believe the university provides some facilities for individuals with disabilities; however, due to architectural barriers, these facilities are not fully sufficient.

My university strives to provide all necessary facilities for people with disabilities and to make their time on campus and their learning processes as easy as possible. However, in some cases, not everything can be done due to external legal regulations. For example, Building A has “historic building” status, and therefore any major structural changes require approval from the State Committee for the Protection of Historical Monuments (Polish: *Konserwator zabytków*).

I can confidently say that we have made significant progress in adapting our university to the needs of people with disabilities, but there is still work to be done. Our university is undoubtedly disability-friendly, but we are aware that not all buildings meet the same accessibility standards. This is particularly true for historic buildings, and adapting them to the needs of people with disabilities is quite challenging. In contrast, all new campus buildings have been designed with full accessibility in mind—a top priority for us.

As for the process-related issues, I can confidently say that we are very well prepared. This applies to both internal organizational arrangements and the appropriate training of academic and administrative staff. Our participation in the “Accessible, Diverse, Open University” project also plays a significant role in this context. Thanks to this project, we have been able to adapt many aspects of our university’s operations to the needs of people with disabilities and significantly improve their experience.

10. Could you offer a few suggestions for improving universities in terms of inclusive education and accessibility, or what else could be done?

Improving inclusive education and accessibility can be achieved by enhancing the competencies of faculty members and university staff in this area, working more effectively with individuals with disabilities, and increasing educational opportunities.

Currently, I believe my university has implemented all possible improvements in line with the general concept of an “accessible university.” However, when it

comes to the specific needs of certain students, conducting a survey among students with disabilities might be a good idea. Through this survey, students can provide feedback on practices they perceive as lacking or in need of improvement at the university. Based on this data, the university can better address students' needs and take the necessary steps.

In my view, developing inclusive education in universities must first and foremost begin with the entire academic community recognizing the fundamental importance of this issue. The transformation process ultimately begins with education and a deep understanding of the concept of inclusivity. In this process, the role of institutional culture cannot be overlooked; when this culture is properly shaped and managed, it becomes a powerful tool for the swift and effective implementation of new solutions and concepts into university life.

In my view, truly inclusive universities must be based on a holistic educational model. The combination of dynamic teamwork, project-based learning, and various credit and workshop formats fosters authentic inclusivity—the cornerstone of institutions that employ inclusive methods.

Another extremely important issue is the shift in attitudes within universities; we must move away from rigid rules governing collaboration between administration and students. Flexibility and openness require that the student be viewed not merely as a subordinate, but as a partner. Of course, this change must occur within reasonable limits and within the framework of generally accepted educational norms; however, the concept of partnership between students and faculty is a key element in building commitment and mutual respect.

In practice, this means that to create a truly inclusive environment, we must not only communicate the idea of inclusivity but also change the way universities operate. This transformation encompasses all processes—from teaching methods to assessment practices, to daily interactions with students. This complex process requires the participation of the entire academic community and a willingness to adapt through continuous learning.

5.0. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's data and findings, both institutions stated that they prioritize inclusive education and the concept of a barrier-free university. However, they also noted that despite all efforts and initiatives, certain shortcomings still exist. Participants at both universities noted that while some practices and support systems exist for people with disabilities or special needs, others are insufficient, not fully utilized, not widely available, lack adequate physical and digital infrastructure, and have limited accessibility. Additionally, the vast majority of participants stated that our university/faculties fall short in

providing all necessary opportunities for people with disabilities or special needs. These shortcomings can be listed as follows:

1. The concepts of empathy, tolerance, and equality have not been sufficiently promoted in society.
2. Although Ondokuz Mayıs University ranks among the top universities in Turkey in terms of inclusive education and becoming a barrier-free university, full access has not yet been provided on the campus grounds and in some buildings. Similarly, the rector of the Angelusa Silesiusa Akademia Nauk Stosowanych University also mentioned the same issue.
3. There have been shortcomings in the creation of digital content and the preparation and development of materials for individuals with disabilities.
4. There is insufficient financial support to make campus areas, classrooms, and laboratories more accessible to people with disabilities; consequently, when some of the elevators designated for their use break down, there are difficulties in repairing them.
5. While contrasting colors, large fonts, and pictograms have been used on campuses, clear and accessible directional signs are either missing or insufficient.
6. Some faculty members lack the necessary skills to teach students with disabilities or special needs, communicate effectively with them, or prepare and provide appropriate course materials.
7. Student organizations are failing to adequately reach out to students with disabilities or special needs.
8. One of the most significant challenges for the partner institution is that the building where they provide education is classified as a historic landmark; therefore, renovations and modifications necessary to fully meet the needs of students with disabilities or special needs require approval.
9. A common socio-psychological barrier observed in both institutions is a lack of acceptance.
10. A large portion of the participants are aware of the existence of the “disabled student unit” at our university but agree that it falls short in practice.
11. The ramps for people with disabilities on campus are insufficient.
12. Individuals with disabilities or special needs who wish to visit the Faculty of Dentistry for an examination have stated that they face difficulties due to the faculty’s lack of full accessibility infrastructure and are forced to arrange

transportation and access on their own. This situation negatively impacts these individuals' access to treatment.

13. Restrooms in some buildings are not suitable for access and use by people with disabilities or special needs.

14. Inclusive education policies are not being effectively implemented within the campus's indoor and outdoor areas.

The “Disabled Student Unit,” which operates within our university, continues its work quite effectively on campus. It is raising awareness by organizing events and seminars focused on accessibility, inclusive design, and empathy-based practices. Additionally, the “Artificial Intelligence Assistant for the Visually Impaired Project,” developed to enable visually impaired individuals to move around campus buildings independently, was launched during “White Cane Week for the Visually Impaired.” Our Rector, stated: “With a focus on the ‘Accessible University,’ we are steadfastly continuing our efforts to make life easier for individuals with disabilities and minimize their disadvantages. In this context, our ‘Inclusive University Life’ training programs for administrative staff continue with content based on a rights-based approach.” She added, “The psychological counseling services, career support training, and social integration initiatives offered by our Office for Students with Disabilities are strengthening our students’ full participation in university life.” With this application, users can easily activate and begin using the system by scanning the QR codes placed at building entrances with their phone cameras. The goal is to create a product that can be easily used not only by our students but also by citizens visiting our university and those coming from neighboring provinces, particularly in complex building structures.

The Angelus Silesius University of Applied Sciences acknowledges that, despite having made significant progress in adapting to the needs of people with disabilities, there are still some tasks that need to be addressed. They note that while their university is undoubtedly disability-friendly, they are aware that not all buildings meet the same accessibility standards. They view themselves as more fortunate in terms of development and improvement due to the relatively small size of their campus and the low number of people with disabilities or special needs. They stated that by sharing the findings of this project, they stated that they would be able to see their shortcomings more clearly and make further progress in line with the work and recommendations made at Ondokuz Mayıs University.

In conclusion, the following recommendations can be made.

1. Academics should be informed in a way that addresses the needs of people with disabilities or special needs.
2. Seminars should be organized, and awareness-raising activities should be increased.
3. Signs and markers on campus that are insufficient for people with disabilities or special needs should be reorganized, their numbers increased, and broken elevators should be repaired as soon as possible to ensure accessibility.
4. Cracked pavers on sidewalks should be repaired. These paving materials, which are essential for people with disabilities or special needs, should be made more widely available across the campus to ensure easy access to every faculty.
5. Course materials required by people with disabilities or special needs should be prepared and made accessible.
6. Peer and mentor training programs should be organized.
7. Special areas can be created for people with disabilities or special needs, and treatment accommodations can be provided.
8. More financial investment should be provided to strengthen the unit for people with disabilities or special needs and to meet their needs.
9. Accessibility should be further improved.
10. Individuals with disabilities or special needs who require psychological support should be provided with the necessary assistance.
11. Meetings should be held with people with disabilities or special needs, and adjustments should be made in accordance with their views and requests.
12. The roles and responsibilities of student groups should be redefined to support people with disabilities or special needs, and in this context, volunteer student groups dedicated to supporting them should be established.
13. Workshops should be organized to promote empathy and awareness of equality.
14. Joint awareness (social awareness) projects should be encouraged.
15. Emphasis should be placed on solution-oriented policies, and psycho-social support units should be established.

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Language Teaching as Cultural Mediation: Critical and Intercultural Perspectives in DaF Education

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The importance of language mediation in shaping and understanding of culture has been acknowledged within applied linguistics for decades, however little has been done to address the implications this has for foreign language pedagogy (for contexts like DaF that are non-Anglo-phonetic environments). As globalisation, migration and interdependence between cultures and nations continues to grow, it is now more important than ever before that we consider why and how language should be taught. Language is a social and ideological system of signs which reflect power, identity and cultural belonging (Pennycook, 2021). The implications that this has for DaF is transformational.

The situation is interesting through the lens of DaF education. As a major world language and vehicle for enormous cultural production, historical complexity and European political identity, German plunges learners into contact not only with linguistic structures but rich, contested and often challenging cultural heritage. Teaching German is, in this sense, always already an exercise in cultural navigation—a practice of mediation between learners' lived worlds and the sociocultural meanings embedded in the target language. Yet the dominant paradigm in DaF pedagogy has been much more obsessed with issues of grammatical accuracy and communicative competence and often the development of critical intercultural awareness that would enable learners to engage both reflexively and knowledgeably with issues surrounding cultural difference, power asymmetries and their own subject positions as language learners has been ignored.

The intention of this chapter is to build on this, advocating a reconceptualization of the DaF education as cultural mediation understood as a dynamic, critical-reflexive processes of negotiating of meanings, identities and values. This vision is grounded in Byram's (2021) latest revisions to the framework of intercultural communicative competence ICC and draws from critical pedagogy in the applied linguistics area (most recently Pennycook, 2021, 2022), critical language awareness (CLA) as a tool for analysis and pedagogy as well as parts of global citizenship education in the foreign language learning

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context and sees and language teaching both as a linguistic, cultural, political, moral and ethical process.

The structure of the paper is as follows: in Section 2, the main theoretical frameworks will be set out; Sections 3 to 6 will then analyse the four more substantive areas in turn: language and identity and intercultural competence in DaF, critical language awareness and language education and global citizenship. Section 7 draws these threads together into the proposal of an critical-intercultural framework for DaF pedagogy and Section 8 considers the implications of this framework for practice, teacher education and research. Finally, Section 9 concludes with a suggestion for continued theoretical and empirical engagement with criticality and interculturality in foreign language settings.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Intercultural Communicative Competence: Byram's Revisited Model

The most influential framework in foreign language education around the world to address the issue of developing Intercultural Communicative Competence has been Byram's model, first systematically theorized in 1997 and updated in the 2021 edition (Byram 2021). The revised model defines the five following interrelated components: attitudes (*savoir être*) of curiosity and openness to cultural otherness and willingness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own, knowledge (*savoirs*) of social groups, their products and practices, in one's own and in the target culture and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction, skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*) and, crucially, critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) defined as "the ability to evaluate critically and on the 'basis of explicit criteria, perspectives and practices in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram 2021).

The fifth component of the ICC, critical cultural awareness is emphasized in the revisited formulation by Byram (2021) in recent years to highlight that intercultural education not only considers knowledge on difference but encompasses critical, ethical, political and sociological elements in assessing the cultural factors which are used in conversation between different cultures, connecting the ICC paradigm with critical approaches in terms of language education. ICC framework does not see the language learner as trying to achieve native-speaker norms but instead as an intercultural speaker and a human being who has multiple cultural frames of reference, involved in a conversation with ethical issues in an attempt to be a mediating agent between those different cultural groups.

This reconceptualization has huge consequences for DaF pedagogy, for it implies that the aim of German language education should not be cultural assimilation into target-culture norms, but the cultivation of a critical and

reflective intercultural stance. Moving from an intercultural framework into a superdiverse framework Baker (2022, 2024) moves this on to transcultural communication, where in the state of globalisation and superdiversity it is the idea of negotiating cultural differences, not between one or the other but hybrid cultural repertoire for the global world than a pure form of that. So in this context the DaF classroom should not focus on German culture and the way Germans do things but in the fluidities, the controversies and the developments of the German culture in the world, in Germany in Austria in Switzerland outside it in the diaspora.

2.2 Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Language

When critical pedagogy gets applied to language education, it means a steady dedication to looking at and pushing back against the links between power and how we use, teach and learn languages. According to Pennycook's (2021) thorough overview of critical applied linguistics, which offers the most solid modern structure for this work, language education has to confront the issues of colonialism, racial inequality, neoliberal ideas and what is known as epistemic injustice. These forces shape the entire field at various junctures. His research makes clear that the decisions about which languages get taught, what cultural elements are included and how language proficiency is evaluated are never truly neutral. Instead, they are deeply entangled with wider power dynamics that benefit certain students and groups while consistently pushing others to the fringes.

In relation to DaF teaching critical pedagogy is the rejection of the cultural authority commonly awarded to German things; things text, things spoken, thing cultural and an encouragement for DaF teaching and teachers to reflect more deeply on its hierarchy which makes the target culture the norm to be reached and student's cultures as either non-existent or secondary. Pennycook (2022) has also argued that critical applied linguistics must reinvent itself, due to the changing current global circumstances of national political resurgences, global capitalism and the constant renewal of epistemic hierarchies in academic knowledge production, these new conditions are not outside DaF pedagogy, these sociopolitical factors which influences DaF has also made " ... reorienting DaF in the contemporary sociopolitical climate critical" .

2.3 Cultural Mediation in the CEFR Companion Volume

The concept of cultural mediation, as operationalized in this paper, draws on and critically extends its usage within the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020). The CEFR Companion Volume significantly expanded the conceptualization of mediation beyond its earlier, narrower treatment as a form of linguistic transfer, defining it as encompassing the creation of conditions for communication and understanding across cultural, linguistic, and social distances. Mediation, in this expanded sense,

involves cognitive, linguistic, and interactional work oriented toward facilitating mutual comprehension and productive engagement across difference.

This functional understanding of mediation gains critical depth when articulated with Byram's ICC framework and Pennycook's critical pedagogy: mediation is not a neutral, technocratic activity but a politically engaged practice that involves navigating power asymmetries, interrogating cultural assumptions, and facilitating understanding on terms that are equitable and dialogic rather than hierarchical and assimilationist. In DaF contexts, cultural mediation takes on specific significance given the complex cultural and historical meanings that attach to German language and culture in global context. The mediating work involved in DaF education thus requires that learners develop not merely communicative fluency but a sophisticated critical awareness of the cultural politics of German-language communication.

3. Language and Identity in Foreign Language Education

The relationship between language and identity constitutes one of the most theoretically generative areas of contemporary applied linguistics. Post-structuralist approaches have fundamentally transformed how identity is conceptualized in language education research, moving from essentialist, fixed models toward dynamic, multiple, and contested understandings of selfhood. Within this theoretical landscape, Darwin and Norton (2023) have elaborated a comprehensive account of investment in language learning that situates learner engagement with a target language at the intersection of ideology, capital, and identity. Their analysis demonstrates that the reasons why learners engage with foreign languages cannot be reduced to intrinsic motivation or utilitarian calculation but are shaped by complex sociopolitical dynamics, including relations of race, class, gender, and cultural positioning, that determine whose linguistic practices are legitimized and whose are marginalized within educational institutions and broader social fields.

Darwin and Norton (2023) present investment theory, a perspective that revises motivational frameworks by challenging the notion that language learning engagement stems solely from within an individual learner. This theory emphasizes the crucial role of social, ideological and material circumstances. These conditions profoundly influence learners' attitudes toward a target language. Consequently, it opens up room for a more educationally sound and politically significant view of language learning. This view frames learning as a practice where an individual's identity is constantly being reshaped. For learners of German as a foreign language (DaF), this approach provides a clearer picture. It shows how their choices about engaging with the language are complex. These choices include which dialect to learn, what cultural norms to embrace and which elements of the target culture to connect with or reject. They are more than just linguistic decisions. Instead, they represent acts of identity construction and

social self-placement. These decisions have tangible effects on learners' pathways, both within and outside of academic settings.

Thinking about identity as something multifaceted, often at the center of disputes and fundamentally influenced by power dynamics carries significant and groundbreaking implications for teaching German as a foreign language (DaF). Students learning German arrive in the classroom with varied linguistic backgrounds, cultural histories and deeply personal notions of self that defy being squeezed into a single, idealized learner mold. This standard profile is typically anchored to the native German speaker, implicitly presented as the default and untroubled norm. The prevailing demographics in today's DaF classrooms—marked more than ever by multilingualism, students with transnational ties and a wide spectrum of cultural and religious experiences—necessitate pedagogical approaches that can truly acknowledge and celebrate this diversity. These differences should be viewed as valuable assets than hurdles demanding eradication.

Writing nearly contemporaneously, Gong, Lai and Gao (2022) provided evidence from Chinese tertiary education showing how critically language teachers' own identities influence their methods for fostering intercultural communicative competence in students. When educators engage in thoughtful consideration of their own cultural locations and linguistic journeys, they are more adept at cultivating classroom settings where students feel emboldened to investigate their identities and actively navigate them through the medium of the target language. This revelation holds considerable weight for DaF teacher training. It strongly suggests that fostering reflective self-awareness concerning cultural identity, individual language histories and one's positioning within intercultural interactions needs to be a core, indispensable element of teacher education programs, not merely an optional add-on.

The tension between learners' home cultural identities and the expectations of target-language cultural environments is particularly pronounced in DaF contexts where learners from non-European backgrounds may encounter not merely linguistic challenges but implicit cultural hierarchies that construct European cultural norms as universal and their own cultural knowledge as supplementary. Critical language awareness approaches, discussed in detail in Section 5, offer learners analytical tools to interrogate these hierarchies rather than simply reproducing them. Meanwhile, the concept of the "third space," as a site of cultural hybridization and creative negotiation that transcends binary cultural framings (Baker, 2022), provides a productive conceptual metaphor for understanding the complex identity work that effective DaF pedagogy both requires and makes possible. Literary representations of migration and cultural hybridity in German-language migrant literature likewise illustrate how identities

are negotiated across multiple cultural spaces rather than anchored in singular national affiliations (Arabacıoğlu & Balkaya, 2020).

4. Intercultural Competence in DaF Contexts: Challenges and Opportunities

Applying the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) frameworks to teaching German as a foreign language (DaF) necessitates both a robust theoretical translation and detailed contextual adaptation. Although Michael Byram's (2021) model primarily draws on foreign language education within Europe, its implementation in varied DaF environments - from Turkey and Japan to Brazil and sub-Saharan Africa - prompts significant inquiries. These address the underlying cultural assumptions informing its design and how its recommended pedagogical approaches function effectively in distinct institutional, political stages and educational situations.

As Daniel Jane Baker (2024) observed, ICC frameworks have often faced criticism for promoting a national-culture paradigm. This approach struggles to capture the intricate, ever-changing and internally diverse nature of cultural identities within today's superdiverse societies. Such a critique becomes especially relevant for DaF instruction. This is due to the debated and varied nature of German-speaking cultures spread across Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and the wider German-speaking sphere. A DaF curriculum that conceives of "German culture" as a single, uniform entity risks perpetuating the essentialist distinctions in culture that critical teaching methodologies aim to dismantle. It might present norms and values specific to certain regions as universal benchmarks learners are expected to adopt.

A more fruitful way to approach ICC within DaF looks for a means for the learners to engage with the plural contested and changing constitution of the German-speaking cultural communities away from a content-centred cultural pedagogy in which the students gain a body of knowledge surrounding target German cultural facts, customs and institutions to a process centred intercultural pedagogy to give learners the dispositions and skills to engage critically, empathetically and reflectively with cultural difference in all its multifaceted complexity. One of the more forward looking recent DaF documents like the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020) by greatly expanding upon its cultural mediation and Plurilingual competence by taking pragmatics and the intercultural into account this framework could accommodate the diversity of DaF learners and contexts alike. Research in DaF literary pedagogy has similarly demonstrated that literary texts can function as powerful instruments for intercultural sensitisation by challenging stereotypes, encouraging perspective-taking, and promoting critical reflection on cultural representations (Arabacıoğlu & Balkaya, 2023). Empirical research into ICC development in DaF contexts has highlighted both the tremendous opportunities and difficulties of intercultural

approaches to teaching German. Telecollaboration exchange programs between learners of German in different national contexts appear to be promising sites of authentic intercultural exchange beyond texts books, which provides the learners with possibilities to engage dialogically, critically and creatively with cultural difference and similarity in a nuanced manner. Such programs inevitably involve complex power dynamics, however, that teachers have to treat with clear pedagogic intentions. This includes the differential linguistic and cultural capital that learners bring to such exchanges, the need to avoid reinforcing or enabling the reproduction of cultural stereotypes and avoid the superficial culturalism which can treat cultural diversity as a curiosity to be catalogued than an issue of ethical importance to be engaged.

Cultivating intercultural communicative competence within German as a Foreign Language (DaF) instruction thus necessitates that educators function concurrently as language teachers, cultural liaisons and critical educators. This presents a complex professional matrix that current DaF teacher training often has not been designed to fully accommodate. Instead of merely offering lists of cultural facts, training for intercultural teaching demands a deeper engagement. This includes fostering critical self-awareness about teachers' own cultural perspectives and personal histories with language learning. Moreover, continuous development in facilitating dialogue and managing disagreements across diverse cultural backgrounds is essential. So too is building the pedagogical toolset to encourage classroom ambiance where cultural intricacy is not just accepted, but is also actively explored, analyzed and constructively reshaped-than being oversimplified into easily digestible cultural clichés.

5. Critical Language Awareness: Toward a Reflexive Language Pedagogy

Critical Language Awareness, often shortened to CLA, is a teaching method designed to help students grasp the ideological underpinnings of language. It focuses on how language use solidifies specific social structures, frames certain identities as standard or abnormal, perpetuates power imbalances and produces meanings that students might mistakenly believe are simply inherent or self-evident. Developed from the critical linguistics movement spearheaded by researchers such as Norman Fairclough and Teun van Dijk, CLA has found growing application in applied linguistics. Its purpose is to furnish language learners with the critical skills needed to examine the texts and discourses prevalent in target language environments, viewing them not as objective conduits of information but as creations deeply shaped by social and political forces. Huang and Guo (2024) recently investigated how critical language awareness (CLA) orientations are included or notably absent, within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching materials. They discovered that while CLA methodologies offer considerable promise for enhancing students' comprehension of the socio-political contexts inherent in language instruction,

their incorporation into mainstream educational resources and daily classroom activities remains restricted. Analyses of DaF teaching materials have likewise demonstrated that textbook design and pedagogical implementation continue to shape the extent to which intercultural and critical perspectives are integrated into classroom practice (Sarkiler, 2025). This observation closely mirrors the situation in the teaching of German as a foreign language (DaF). In this field, teaching heavily reliant on textbooks often discourages any critical examination of language and power dynamics. Such materials tend to present the use of the target language as inherently normal, standard and beyond dispute, thereby obscuring the ideological work textbooks undertake to establish specific portrayals of German cultures, its speakers and societal connections as definitive.

For those learning German as a foreign language, CLA holds particular relevance, especially considering the historical and political significance associated with the German language itself as a cultural and ideological entity. When one considers the complex linguistic legacies from the National Socialist era, the political aspects of German language standardization and its ties to national identity, the debated position of Kiezdeutsch and other non-standard dialects as indicators of either belonging or alienation within society and the political dimensions of German when used as a heritage language by Turkish-German and other diasporic populations-all these elements represent crucial areas for critical linguistic and cultural investigation. A CLA framework can effectively engage with these topics within the DaF classroom setting.

Encouraging students to view language as a social construct promotes an analytical perspective. This shift helps them evolve from simply reading target-language materials to becoming critical readers. They gain the ability to question the ideological purposes language serves within particular communicative situations. Such a change in how learners relate to language does not hinder the development of their language skills; , evidence suggests a strong link. Enhanced metalinguistic awareness and the skill of critical discourse analysis can actually improve language use by making individuals more attuned to the social and contextual nuances of meaning.

Pennycook (2021) asserted that critical applied linguistics needs to progress past mere analysis. It should encourage a transformative outlook, linking classroom-based critical investigation with wider social and political involvement. For German as a Foreign Language (DaF) teaching, this means that CLA should not be a standalone goal-just an intellectual exercise in dissecting discourse. Instead, it requires integration into a more extensive intercultural pedagogy. This approach aims to equip learners, preparing them to function as knowledgeable, ethically mindful and socially responsible communicators within both German-speaking and multilingual environments. This transformative

aspect of CLA aligns well with the broader objectives of global citizenship education, which the subsequent section will explore.

6. Language Education and Global Citizenship

Over the last ten years, how foreign language education connects with global citizenship has become a major focus for both theoretical research and new teaching methods. The idea that acquiring another language helps encourage globally aware, culturally considerate and sharply observant individuals has gained significant traction within policy discussions surrounding language learning. However, developing the theoretical underpinnings of this concept and implementing it effectively in actual teaching practices are still pursuits that are actively underway and at times, a source of disagreement. It raises fundamental questions: What exactly entails becoming a global citizen by way of studying a foreign language? What specific teaching approaches truly encourage the development of global civic identities, than just yielding superficial expressions of cosmopolitan ideals? Furthermore, how do the existing power dynamics that shape language education across the world complicate the implementation of such practices?

Recent discussions on sustainability in foreign language education have similarly emphasised the need to move beyond purely linguistic outcomes and towards socially responsible, future-oriented language learning that prepares learners for participation in increasingly interconnected societies (Sarkiler, 2025). Byram (2021) offers a compelling, well-developed answer to these issues with his notion of the "intercultural citizen. " He highlights intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as key to broadly engaging with socio-political matters across different cultures, nations and languages. Byram sees an intercultural citizen as more than just a capable cross-cultural communicator; this individual is also driven, prepared and dedicated to advocating for social justice, democratic ideals and solidarity among cultures. Essentially, they are both an agent of change and a skilled communicator. This vision fits well with global citizenship education models that emphasize human dignity, unity, environmental awareness, critical thinking and dedication to tackling the worldwide challenges we face in our deeply interconnected world.

In a DaF context therefore, global citizenship education will be specifically historically contextualised; learning German links learners to political, cultural, philosophical, scientific traditions of the German-speaking world AND in doing so they place themselves in relationship to European identity, multilateral governance, the history of German-language communities in global diaspora, as well as debates about the role of Europe in addressing global challenges from climate change to migration. DaF pedagogy can engage with these connections in ways that encourage reflective, critical and politically engaged citizenship or it can not. The former, more ambitious path requires that DaF practitioners engage explicitly and directly with issues of power, equity and responsibility

within their pedagogical practice. This might take the form of: a critical encounter with the representations of German-language cultures (as perceived both in the German-speaking world itself and through global media and public discourse more widely), engagement with how they represent themselves through the language and the history of their ideas; engagement with the politics of language choice and cultural dimensions of German-linguistic capital in specific national and regional contexts, a consideration of the relationship between their German-language competence and socioeconomic mobility for them as learners in their national or regional contexts and an exploration of the cultural and political dimensions of German-speaking minority communities across a range of global settings.

Looking beyond the superficial, global citizenship education within the realm of DaF requires what Pennycook (2022) termed "radical hope. " This involves a mindset geared toward potential and change, one that pushes back against the immobility caused by global disparities without falling into the trap of unthinking positivity. When viewed through the critical-intercultural lens presented here, the DaF classroom emerges as fertile ground where students can cultivate more than just effective German communication skills. They can also encourage civic perspectives, critical attitudes and ethical principles necessary to engage thoughtfully as active members in our ever more intricate and interconnected global society. This approach to language learning is certainly ambitious, but its scale is fitting when considering the real, urgent complexities confronting individuals navigating the twenty-first century.

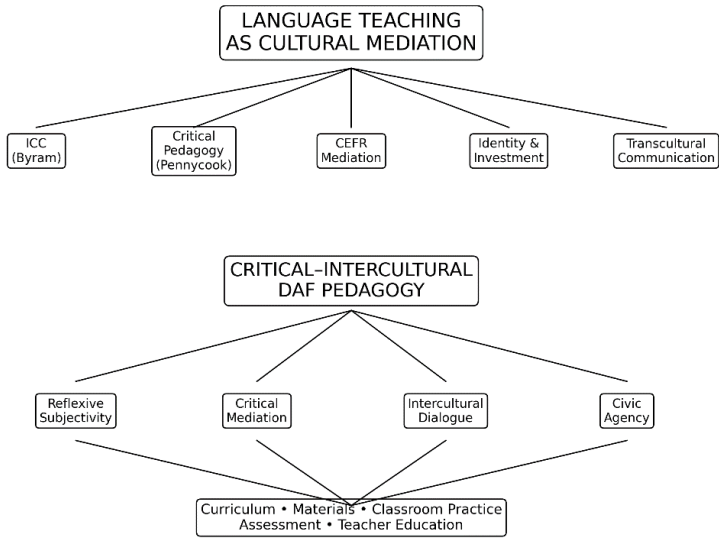


Figure 1. Critical-Intercultural Framework for DaF Education.

Conceptual integration of intercultural communicative competence, critical pedagogy, mediation, identity-investment theory, and transcultural communication within a critical-intercultural model of DaF education.

7. Toward a Critical-Intercultural Pedagogical Framework for DaF

The theoretical examination conducted in the preceding sections culminates in a proposed critical-intercultural pedagogical framework for German as a Foreign Language (DaF) education. This framework seeks to consolidate perspectives from Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) theory, critical applied linguistics, Critical Language Awareness (CLA) and global citizenship education. The aim is to establish a well-defined and practically applicable pedagogical stance. It rests upon four core principles that are interconnected and strengthen one another. Each principle takes theoretical aspirations and transforms them into pedagogical guidelines intended to inform curriculum development, teaching methodologies, student evaluation and the training of teachers within DaF settings.

7.1 Reflexive Subjectivity

A foundational principle of effective DaF pedagogy is what is termed reflexive subjectivity. This asserts that learners should be seen as active subjects engaged in self-reflection, with their cultural backgrounds, ingrained assumptions, personal language histories and emotional connections to the subject matter being not secondary, but pivotal to how they learn. As Darwin and Norton (2023) suggest, this perspective demands we consider more than just a learner's linguistic knowledge or skills. It involves understanding what they are investing in the language learning journey specifically. How is this investment influenced by where they stand socially? And how can the DaF classroom encourage an environment where students can critically explore these intricate relationships? Practices that bring to the surface and honor learners' varied cultural assets, encourage critical introspection concerning their own stances relative to the target language and carve out authentic space for navigating multifaceted, numerous identities; these represent key embodiments of this principle.

7.2 Critical Mediation

A second foundational idea, robust mediation, reframes the German as a Foreign Language (DaF) classroom. This re-envisioning sees it not just as a place for students to gain proficiency in sharing information across language and culture gaps. Instead, it equips them to critically assess meanings, to consciously consider the power dynamics shaping those cross-cultural exchanges. It pushes them to question underlying beliefs within target language materials and their use. The goal is to encourage understanding based on fairness and mutual engagement. This concept draws from the widened view of mediation presented

in the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020). Furthermore, it incorporates the critical and political focus championed by Pennycook's (2021, 2022) framework for critical applied linguistics. Achieving critical mediation means DaF instructors should show and encourage not just linguistic transfer skills alone. They should also cultivate the cultural self-awareness and political insight that characterize an developed intercultural communicator.

7.3 Intercultural Dialogue

The third principle, intercultural dialogue, draws on Byram's (2021) updated model of ICC and Baker's (2022, 2024) conceptualization of transcultural communication to locate genuine, critically aware intercultural dialogue at the center of DaF pedagogical design. This dialogue is understood not as an idealised encounter between fully sovereign cultural equals, but as a situated, power-conscious and ethically engaged practice in which participants recognise the asymmetries that characterise real-world cross-cultural encounters, whilst working towards understanding, respect and mutual enrichment. This demands pedagogical designs that establish meaningful opportunities for authentic contact with German-language speakers and cultural products, equip learners with the dispositions and analytical skills to navigate cultural complexity without reducing it and encourage sustained critical reflection on the outcomes, limitations and possibilities of specific intercultural encounters.

7.4 Civic Agency

Beyond intercultural understanding, the framework ultimately aims to empower learners to act upon the social, ethical, and political implications of intercultural encounters. Taken together, DaF teaching based on the critical-intercultural approach is aimed at preparing the learners to become informed, ethically sensitive and socially responsible members taking position about issues of importance at local, national and global situations and taking decision and acting individually or with others. This links language learning directly to the goals and projects of a democratic citizenry and, through its concern for intercultural solidarity in an age of globalization and increasing intercultural encounters, it makes an explicit claim for language education as making a genuine contribution towards finding ways for a more equal, dialogic and peaceful understanding of intercultural encounters. Critical-intercultural DaF Teaching with civic agency has developed as the most comprehensive form of foreign language education for intercultural communication, one that is linked to a conception of global citizenship which embraces the social and political stakes of language learning.

TRADITIONAL DAF

CRITICAL-INTERCULTURAL DAF

Grammar Accuracy	→	Cultural Mediation
Native-Speaker Norm	→	Intercultural Speaker
Cultural Facts	→	Critical Cultural Awareness
Target-Culture Adaptation	→	Reflexive Identity Negotiation
Communicative Competence	→	Intercultural Dialogue
Language Skills	→	Civic Agency
Teacher as Knowledge Provider	→	Teacher as Cultural Mediator
Culture as Static	→	Culture as Dynamic and Contested

Figure 2. From Traditional to Critical-Intercultural DaF Pedagogy.

Comparison of the core assumptions, pedagogical goals, and cultural orientations characterising traditional DaF pedagogy and the critical-intercultural framework proposed in this chapter.

8. Discussion: Implications for Theory, Practice, and Research

The Framework offers important practical and theoretical implications for DaF pedagogy as well with a focus on future research. The Framework establishes that a more complete and critically-attuned notion of cultural mediation is a theoretical and practical priority for DaF (and by extension non-Anglophone foreign language) pedagogy in general. This, in turn, will allow DaF to contribute the wider field of applied linguistics, critical education studies and critical theory in a more meaningful way.

For DaF practitioners, this Framework offers orientations for making pedagogical choices when approaching issues of cultural and linguistic diversity, linguistic rights, ideologies and power in the classroom. Many of the approaches discussed-such as telecollaboration, critique of texts and images, critical and contextualized-discursive analysis of cultural productions, project based learning on topics such as migration and intercultural encounters and an openness to including heritage learners and their linguistic repertoire-are recognized as valid and effective pedagogical practices in reflective DaF contexts, but lack a broader theoretical Framework which makes their critical and intercultural potential explicit and actionable. Currently, empirical studies on intercultural communicative competence (ICC) development within German as a foreign language (DaF) settings have largely zeroed in on students gathering factual cultural information or demonstrating observable shifts in attitude.

There is been less focus, however, on the critical aspects of intercultural growth. This includes, for instance, a student's ability to dissect the power dynamics inherent in cross-cultural exchanges, to challenge the cultural hierarchies I might encounter within teaching materials or even to participate in

culturally and politically aware communication in real-world scenarios. Promising avenue for future research should put these critical areas front and center. Such studies would benefit greatly from using qualitative, ethnographic and participatory research methods. These approaches can better capture the nuanced and context-specific ways learners construct intercultural meaning over extended periods. Furthermore, the presented framework emphasizes the pressing need for research focused on teacher education. Critically, this research should explore how DaF instructors perceive and carry out critical intercultural pedagogy across various institutional, national and cultural landscapes.

The work by Gong et al. (2022), exploring the link between language teacher identity and the teaching of ICC, compellingly illustrates that a teacher's personal intercultural experiences, their own cultural standing and underlying beliefs about culture greatly influence the learning spaces for intercultural development they establish with their students. This insight strongly suggests that DaF teacher training programs must be intentionally designed. They should offer extended, organized and critical opportunities for prospective teachers I would reflect deeply on their personal cultural backgrounds and their histories with language. This reflexive examination should serve as a cornerstone of their entire professional growth journey.

9. Conclusion

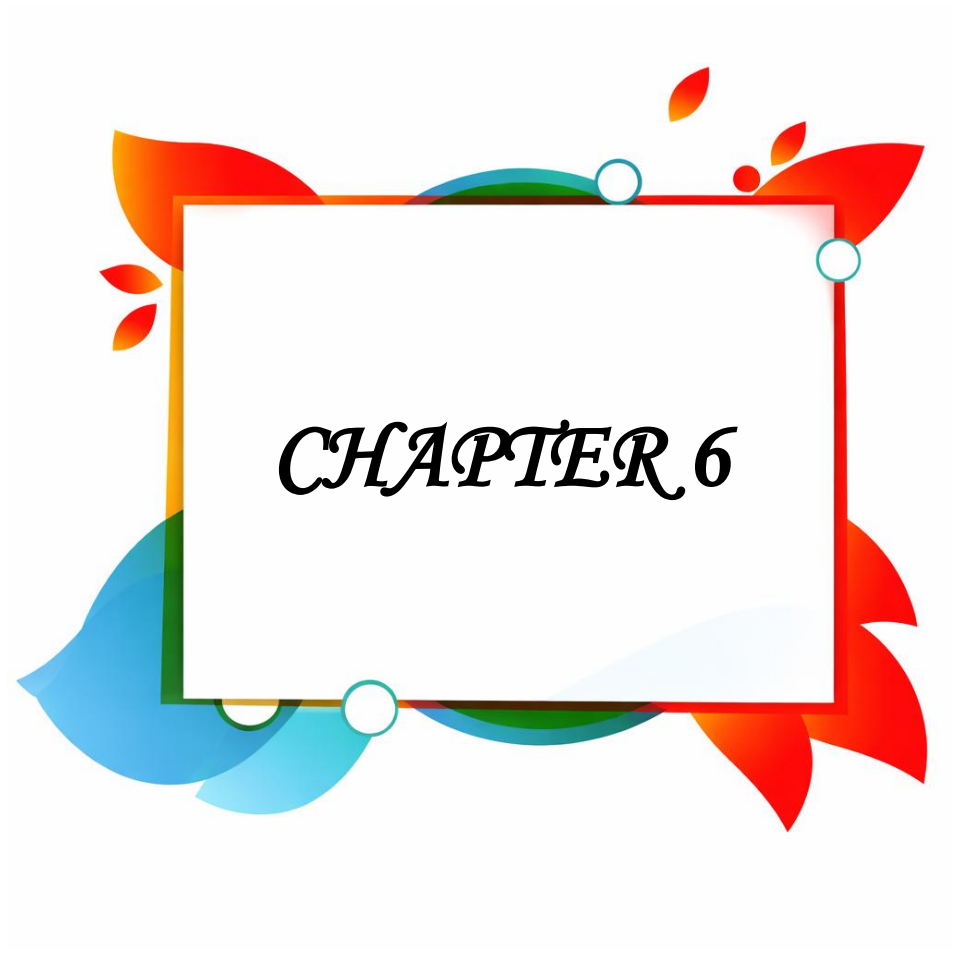
This paper has argued for a radical re-imagination of DaF education as a practice of cultural mediation that integrates critical and intercultural perspectives into a focused and ambitious pedagogical framework, underpinned with Byram's (2021) revised model of Intercultural Communicative Competence, Pennycook's (2021, 2022) critical applied linguistics, Darwin and Norton's (2023) theory of investment and identity, Baker's (2022, 2024) work on intercultural and transcultural communication and the CEFR Companion Volume's (Council of Europe, 2020) conceptional expansion of mediation, it has built a critical-intercultural framework around four core principles reflective subjectivity, critical mediation, intercultural dialogue and civic agency. These principles offer a comprehensive and practically orientable alternative to the instrumentalized models of language teaching that have often dominated DaF pedagogy and that reduce the teaching of German to the transmission of linguistic codes and cultural facts. The critical-intercultural framework of this paper demands transformations; radical, challenging and necessary; in curriculum development, pedagogical method, teaching material, assessment and teacher education. Crucially, it demands that these transformations be understood not as ancillary additions to what is, in all essence, a linguistic pedagogy, but as constitutive of what it means to teach languages with rigourfulness in twenty-first century Europe.

In short I shall argue that the teaching of language is an inherently and unavoidably political act. To teach German as a foreign language is to mediate between worlds, to negotiate meanings across difference, to position learners in complex webs of cultural, historical and political significance. Done done critically and interculturallly- with an awareness of power, an openness to dialogue, a respect for learner identities and orientations towards civic engagement- this pedagogical work has the potential to contribute not merely to the learners' linguistic competences but to the cultivation of the reflective, dialogic and civically-engaged subjectivities so needed in an interconnected but frequently fractured world. The challenge for DaF (its researches, teacher educators, curriculum developers and classroom practitioners alike) is to realise this potential with all the theoretical rigour, pedagogical inventiveness and sustained political commitment it deserves.

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Evaluating an English for Specific Purposes Program at the University Level: An Illuminative Approach

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1. Introduction

The growing importance of English as the global language of academia and commerce has intensified demand for tailored language instruction that goes beyond general proficiency training. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emerged as a response to this demand, emphasizing the design of language curricula around learners' particular communicative goals within professional or disciplinary contexts (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). While ESP has evolved considerably over the past six decades—expanding from narrow register analysis to broad genre-based and skills-integrated approaches—the systematic evaluation of ESP programs remains underrepresented in the research literature, particularly in Turkish higher education (Tsou & Chen, 2014).

This chapter addresses that gap by reporting on a comprehensive evaluation of an ESP program designed for third-year engineering students at a private Turkish university. The program, titled Academic and Professional Communication in English, aims to cultivate a set of soft skills—specifically presentation, written academic and professional communication, and job interview competencies—deemed essential for students' post-graduation trajectories. Although the program had undergone informal, incremental adjustments since its inception in 2013, no systematic, theoretically grounded evaluation had been conducted. This absence of structured evaluation constituted a significant programmatic weakness and provided the impetus for the present study.

The chapter is organized as follows. Section 2 situates the study within the theoretical landscape of ESP and program evaluation, with particular attention to the Illuminative Evaluation Model. Section 3 describes the research

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methodology, including participants, data sources, and analysis procedures. Section 4 presents findings organized around the study's three research questions. Section 5 discusses the findings in relation to relevant literature. The chapter concludes with practical recommendations and implications for future ESP program evaluation research.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 English for Specific Purposes: Conceptual Foundations

ESP is broadly defined as the teaching and learning of English in contexts where learners have identified, domain-specific communicative purposes (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). Anthony (1997) distinguishes between absolute characteristics—ESP courses are designed to meet specified learner needs and relate to particular disciplines, occupations, and activities—and variable characteristics, including multidisciplinary and a focus on language appropriate to target activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse, and genre. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) further observe that ESP is essentially a materials-oriented and teaching-driven movement, while Robinson (1991) highlights goal-orientation and needs-analysis as its two defining features.

Within the ESP umbrella, the program under examination falls at the intersection of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). It targets the academic presentation and written communication skills typical of EAP while simultaneously addressing the professional job-search and interview competencies characteristic of EOP. This dual orientation reflects the program's aim of preparing engineering students for both the final phases of their undergraduate studies and their imminent entry into the labor market.

2.2 Program Evaluation in ESP Contexts

Program evaluation—defined broadly as the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of information about a program's components for the purpose of improving or judging it (Klenowski, 2010)—has occupied a central place in educational research since the curriculum reform movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Within language education, ESP program evaluation has attracted growing scholarly attention, with researchers employing diverse models ranging from goal-free and objectives-based approaches to stakeholder-oriented and participant-centered frameworks (Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2011).

Tsou and Chen (2014) note that despite the acknowledged importance of evaluation in ensuring that ESP programs are appropriately planned, implemented, and continuously improved, systematic evaluation studies in this field remain sparse. Studies that do exist tend to focus on needs analysis (Bosher & Smalkoski, 2002; Duran-Güler, 2021), learner perceptions (Arnó-Macià, Aguilar-Pérez & Tatzl, 2020; Şahin-Hocaoğlu, 2020), or material evaluation,

rather than on holistic program assessment using validated theoretical frameworks.

2.3 The Illuminative Evaluation Model

The Illuminative Evaluation Model, developed by Malcolm Parlett and David Hamilton (1972) at the University of Edinburgh, arose from dissatisfaction with the narrowness of conventional, objectives-based evaluation paradigms that treated educational programs as fixed inputs measured against predetermined outputs. Parlett and Hamilton (1972) argued that such approaches failed to capture the complexity of educational reality, overlooking the dynamic, context-dependent nature of teaching and learning.

The model centers on two interrelated concepts: the instructional system and the learning milieu. The instructional system encompasses the formal plans, syllabi, and pedagogical assumptions that describe a program in its idealized form. The learning milieu refers to the social, psychological, and material environment in which instruction occurs—a complex web of cultural, institutional, and individual variables that shapes what learners experience. Illuminative evaluators maintain that understanding the gap between the instructional system and the learning milieu is essential for generating evaluatively relevant knowledge.

The evaluation proceeds through three overlapping phases: observation, inquiry, and explanation. In the observation phase, the evaluator familiarizes herself with the program through site visits, preliminary interviews, and document analysis, identifying recurring patterns and potential issues. In the inquiry phase, selected topics are investigated in depth through systematic data collection. In the explanation phase, causal and interpretive connections are drawn among findings, yielding an illuminated account of the program that can inform stakeholder decision-making.

Crucially, the model sanctions the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. As Özüdoğru and Adıgüzel (2016) observe, the model's embrace of quantitative data reflects scientific rigor, while its privileging of qualitative depth ensures humanistic relevance. This methodological eclecticism makes it particularly well-suited to ESP program evaluation, where the interplay between formal curricular intentions and lived learner experience is of central concern.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a concurrent mixed-method case study design. The case under investigation was the Academic and Professional Communication in English program delivered to third-year engineering students during the 2021–2022 academic year at a private Turkish university. The unit of analysis

encompassed student self-efficacy, speaking anxiety, motivational study conditions, participant perceptions, and program elements. This design allowed for the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data streams, thereby strengthening the trustworthiness of findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.2 Program Description

The program was originally designed in 2013 exclusively for Industrial Engineering students before being extended to all engineering departments in the 2017–2018 academic year. It is offered to third-year students across two semesters (fall and spring) and delivered over 14 weeks at four contact hours per week (two sessions of two hours each). The curriculum integrates four skill areas: (a) academic presentation skills; (b) written academic communication, specifically the Statement of Purpose; (c) professional written communication, including CV and Cover Letter preparation; and (d) job interview skills. Assessment is entirely performance-based—no mid-term or final examinations are administered—with four graded tasks weighted differentially: Presentation 1 (15%), Presentation 2 (25%), Statement of Purpose draft and final copy (10% + 20%), and CV/Cover Letter and Job Interview role-play (30%). All instruction during the evaluation period was conducted online via Microsoft Teams due to COVID-19 pandemic condition.

3.3 Participants

The qualitative sample was selected through maximum variation purposive sampling across department, gender, and grade point average. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 students (see Table 1) and 3 instructors (see Table 2). Student interviews averaged 53 minutes; instructor interviews averaged 57 minutes. All interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams and audio-recorded with participants' consent.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Student Interview Participants

Code	Department	Gender	Prep Class	Prior ESP Exp.	Final Grade	GPA
S1	Civil Eng.	M	Yes	None	C+	
S2	Industrial Eng.	M	No	None	B+	
S3	Computer Eng.	M	No	None	A-	
S4	Civil Eng.	M	Yes	None	A-	
S5	Industrial Eng.	F	No	None	A-	
S6	Energy Systems Eng.	M	Yes	None	B	
S7	Electrical-Electronics Eng.	M	No	None	A-	
S8	Software Eng.	M	Yes	None	A-	
S9	Software Eng.	F	Yes	None	A-	
S10	Industrial Eng.	M	Yes	None	D+	
S11	Computer Eng.	M	Yes	None	B+	
S12	Software Eng.	M	No	None	A	
S13	Energy Systems Eng.	M	Yes	None	C+	
S14	Computer Eng.	F	Yes	None	A-	
S15	Computer Eng.	M	Yes	None	B+	
S16	Software Eng.	M	Yes	None	B-	
S17	Mechanical Eng.	M	No	None	A	

S18	Software Eng.	F	Yes	None	D+	
S19	Energy Systems Eng.	F	Yes	None	A-	

Table 2. Instructor Participant Profiles

Code	Role in the Program	Prior ESP Teaching Experience
I1	Program coordinator and instructor	Yes
I2	Multi-semester instructor	No
I3	First-time instructor	Yes

3.4 Quantitative Data Collection Instruments

Three validated scales were administered as pre- and post-tests (or post-test only).

The English Speaking Anxiety Scale (ESAS), developed by Woodrow (2006) and adapted into Turkish by Alkan, Bümen, and Uslu (2019), consists of 12 items across two subscales: in-class speaking anxiety and out-of-class speaking anxiety. The Turkish adaptation demonstrated adequate reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$ for in-class; $.85$ for out-of-class) and confirmatory factor analysis indices within acceptable ranges (RMSEA = $.084$; CFI = $.97$).

The English Self-Efficacy Beliefs Scale (ESEBS), developed by Hancı-Yanar and Bümen (2012), comprises 34 items across four skill-specific subscales (reading, writing, listening, speaking). The scale's overall Cronbach's α was $.97$, with subscale alphas ranging from $.88$ to $.93$. Its psychometric properties were subsequently confirmed for university student populations by Üstünoğlu, Bümen, and Öğretmen (2018).

The Motivational Study Conditions Scale (MSCS), originally developed in German by Kauper et al. (2010) and culturally adapted into Turkish by Uslu (2021), measures eight dimensions of instructional quality: social interaction, competence support, autonomy support, instructor–student relationship, content relevance, teaching quality, instructor's interest in the subject, and excessive workload/difficulty. The Turkish adaptation confirmed the eight-factor structure with item factor loadings between $.41$ and $.87$ and a total variance explanation of 72% .

3.5 Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative data were collected through four channels: semi-structured student interviews, semi-structured instructor interviews, lesson observation (recording-based, three lessons per instructor), and document analysis (syllabus, course booklet, assignment rubrics, and task instructions). All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and coded using MAXQDA 2022. Content analysis proceeded iteratively: initial open coding was followed by thematic clustering, with an expert review at each stage to ensure internal and external coherence. Coded themes were organized under the four program elements constituting the first research question.

Trustworthiness was enhanced through multiple triangulation strategies: data source triangulation (interviews, observations, documents), method triangulation (qualitative and quantitative), and member checking through follow-up clarification with participants. The researcher's dual position as program coordinator and instructor was acknowledged as a potential source of bias, which was addressed through reflexive memos, verbatim quotation in reporting, and data triangulation.

4. Findings

4.1 Program Objectives, Content, Learning-Teaching Process, and Assessment

4.1.1 Program Objectives

Content analysis of the syllabus and participant interviews identified four clusters of soft-skill objectives: communication, presentation, research, and critical thinking. Students demonstrated a clear awareness of these objectives, and both students and instructors confirmed that the objectives addressed genuine learner needs.

Communication skills encompassed both oral and written self-expression for academic and professional purposes. Students recognized that engineering undergraduates typically lack structured opportunities to develop these competencies within their departmental curricula. As one student noted, engineering programs are predominantly numerical and applied, leaving graduates without the fluency to articulate their competencies in job applications or professional meetings. Instructors similarly emphasized that the ability to communicate effectively—not only to perform technical tasks—is increasingly foregrounded in graduate recruitment.

Presentation skills were identified as a priority need for both academic contexts (departmental project presentations) and professional contexts (client briefings, conference participation). Research skills—specifically the ability to locate, evaluate, and synthesize academic sources—were embedded within the

presentation tasks, introducing students to university library databases and the conventions of academic citation. Critical thinking skills, closely intertwined with research competence, were developed through tasks requiring students to synthesize evidence, construct arguments, and evaluate information from multiple perspectives.

The sequencing of objectives—presentation skills first, followed by Statement of Purpose, then CV/Cover Letter, and finally job interview—was viewed by most participants as logical and internally coherent. The progression mirrors a plausible real-world trajectory from academic self-presentation to professional job seeking. One student, however, noted that for students who intended to apply for internships at the beginning of the spring semester, the placement of CV instruction late in the program created a practical inconvenience.

4.1.2 Program Content

Document analysis of the course booklet revealed that the content was organized into four thematically aligned sections corresponding to the four objective clusters. Each section employed student-centered exercises progressing from receptive to productive tasks, consistent with a discovery-based pedagogical philosophy. The booklet's content was rated as appropriate in terms of level (B1+) and relevance, though several students noted that example texts in the job interview section were perceived as dated and that some sections contained insufficient model texts.

Instructors confirmed that the content of the booklet aligned with the syllabus objectives. Content coherence was evidenced by the thematic links across sections: skills developed for academic presentations (organizing evidence, using hedging language) transferred directly to the Statement of Purpose and, subsequently, to the job interview role-play.

4.1.3 Learning-Teaching Process

Lesson observations and interview data converged on a pattern of differentiated, student-centered instruction. Instructors employed three broad teaching methods—expository presentation, guided discussion, and modeled practice (show-and-do)—combined with four primary techniques: brainstorming, question-and-answer exchanges, group work, and collaborative jigsaw activities. Web 2.0 tools (notably Jamboard) were used to facilitate interactive group tasks, and participants consistently praised these tools for enhancing engagement.

Entry activities included a review of the previous lesson content, statement of learning objectives, and motivational framing (explaining the real-world relevance of target skills). Development activities followed a task-based progression from controlled to freer production. Closure activities, contingent upon student participation/when student participation permitted, involved comprehension checks and consolidating feedback.

The online mode of delivery produced a bifurcated pattern of outcomes. On the positive side, students benefited from the flexibility of asynchronous lesson recordings—particularly those who were employed or who missed sessions—and from the ease of accessing digital resources during tasks. On the negative side, the online format reduced social cohesion, contributed to declining attendance over the semester, and inhibited spontaneous participation. Students who did not know their classmates were less willing to unmute their microphones or activate their cameras. Speaking anxiety was specifically cited as exacerbated by the impersonal quality of online interaction, consistent with findings by Topçu and Başbay (2020).

4.1.4 Assessment

Performance-based assessment tasks were consistently rated as aligned with program objectives. Analytic rubrics for each of the four main tasks were praised for their transparency, the granularity of their criteria, and their utility as self-evaluation tools during task preparation. Students reported using rubrics to self-assess their drafts before submitting, while instructors noted that detailed rubrics facilitated inter-rater consistency.

The two-submission structure for both the presentation and Statement of Purpose tasks—with lower weighting for the initial submission—was unanimously endorsed by students as fair, motivating, and pedagogically productive. The rationale was consistent: an initial low-stakes submission allows students to receive formative feedback and address gaps before the higher-stakes final version. Instructors confirmed that this structure was particularly valuable for writing and speaking tasks, where iterative revision is central to skill development (Kostryska & Shvets, 2012).

Rubric-related concerns centered on two issues. First, certain criteria (e.g., task achievement and topic knowledge in the presentation rubric) were described as overlapping or insufficiently operational, leading to occasional ambiguity during scoring. Second, instructors suggested adding criteria to capture behaviors not currently assessed, such as responding to formative feedback between drafts in the Statement of Purpose rubric.

4.2 Speaking Anxiety and English Self-Efficacy: Pre–Post Comparisons

Due to low paired sample counts ($n = 10$), pre–post comparisons were conducted using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. Table 3 presents descriptive statistics and test results for both speaking anxiety subscales.

Table 3. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Results for Speaking Anxiety Subscales

Subscale	Pre M (SD)	Post M (SD)	Diff.	z	p	Significance
In-class speaking anxiety	2.07 (0.93)	1.80 (0.86)	−0.27	−0.772	.440	Not significant
Out-of-class speaking anxiety	1.80 (0.70)	1.37 (0.41)	−0.43	−1.968	.049*	Significant

Note. * $p < .05$.

In-class speaking anxiety showed a small decrease from pre- to post-test (M difference = -0.27), but this change did not reach statistical significance ($z = -0.772$, $p = .440$). Out-of-class speaking anxiety, by contrast, decreased significantly (M difference = -0.43 ; $z = -1.968$, $p = .049$), indicating that the program had a meaningful effect on students' anxiety about using English in informal, non-academic settings.

Self-efficacy gains across all four subscales (reading: $+0.08$; writing: $+0.45$; listening: $+0.37$; speaking: $+0.05$) were positive but did not attain statistical significance (all $p > .05$). This pattern is consistent with prior research showing that students already proficient at the B1+ level may exhibit ceiling effects on self-efficacy measures (İşpınar Akçayoğlu, Ozer & Efeoğlu, 2019), and that longitudinal self-efficacy gains typically require extended instructional periods.

4.3 Motivational Study Conditions

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics for the eight MSCS subscales, based on post-test responses from 35 students (scale range: 1–4).

Table 4. Motivational Study Conditions Scale Subscale Means (N = 35)

Subscale	Min	Max	M	SD
Instructor–student relationship	2.00	4.00	3.58	0.65
Content relevance	1.67	4.00	3.56	0.62
Instructor's interest in subject	2.00	4.00	3.54	0.69
Competence support	2.00	4.00	3.53	0.64
Autonomy support	2.67	4.00	3.52	0.51
Teaching quality	2.00	4.00	3.51	0.69
Social interaction	2.00	4.00	3.36	0.58
Excessive workload / difficulty	1.00	4.00	2.56	1.02

Six of eight subscales yielded means above 3.50, reflecting highly positive student evaluations of instructor–student relationship, content relevance, instructor enthusiasm, competence support, autonomy support, and teaching quality. Social interaction ($M = 3.36$) was slightly lower, likely reflecting the attenuated peer contact inherent in online instruction. Excessive workload/difficulty scored notably lower ($M = 2.56$), suggesting that students perceived the program as moderately demanding rather than overwhelming—an appropriate finding given the program's emphasis on authentic, skill-based tasks.

5. Discussion

5.1 Alignment Between Objectives and Learner Needs

The finding that program objectives align with learners' academic and professional communication needs echoes several studies documenting the centrality of soft skills in engineering graduates' employability profiles (Carter, 2011; Rao, 2014; De Campos, De Resende & Fagundes, 2020). Carter (2011) identified oral and written communication skills as the top two competencies sought by employers of engineering graduates in Vienna, while Rao (2014) found a broad consensus among students, faculty, and industry representatives that soft skills are indispensable for professional survival. The present findings suggest that embedding these competencies within a discipline-specific language curriculum is an effective vehicle for their development.

The observation that students were clearly aware of program objectives, and that this awareness was facilitated by a transparent and accessible syllabus, is consistent with Ediger's (2006) argument that stated objectives must be comprehensible to both instructors and learners if they are to guide effective instruction. Gültekin (2020), in a comparable ESP evaluation study in Türkiye, found that low language proficiency combined with objective opacity contributed to reduced student motivation—a problem that the present program largely avoided by pitching objectives at an appropriate B1+ level.

5.2 Content, Teaching Processes, and Learner Engagement

The content's internal coherence—evident in the thematic interlinking of presentation, Statement of Purpose, CV/Cover Letter, and job interview modules—reflects sound principles of curriculum design (Demirel, 2000; Sönmez, 2020). The discovery-oriented exercises in the course booklet, combined with student-centered instructional techniques, created conditions conducive to active learning. These findings resonate with Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) foundational prescription that ESP programs incorporate learner-centered pedagogy and with Poedjiastutie's (2017) reminder that effective ESP instruction focuses on contextualized language use rather than decontextualized grammar instruction.

The consistently high MSCS scores for teaching quality, content relevance, and instructor enthusiasm align with Kerekovic's (2021) finding that flexible, formatively weighted assessment combined with high instructional quality sustains motivation in ESP contexts. The relatively lower score for social interaction underscores the well-documented challenge of building community in online learning environments (Gürer, Tekinarslan & Yavuzalp, 2016).

5.3 Assessment Design and Formative Feedback

The dual-submission, graduated-weight assessment structure—endorsed unanimously by students—exemplifies what Kutlu, Doğan, and Karakaya (2017) describe as the pedagogical potential of performance-based assessment: the assessment itself becomes a learning event, not merely a measurement occasion. The iterative revision cycle embedded in both the presentation and Statement of Purpose tasks operationalizes the formative feedback loop that Kostrytska and Shvets (2012) identify as essential to productive assessment in language learning contexts.

The use of analytic rubrics is consistent with the literature's recommendation that analytic instruments provide more valid and reliable assessment of complex language performances than holistic alternatives (Kutlu et al., 2017; Metruk, 2018). Participants' suggestions for rubric refinement—particularly the clarification of overlapping criteria—point to an area for targeted improvement that would further enhance scoring consistency across instructors.

5.4 Speaking Anxiety and Self-Efficacy

The significant reduction in out-of-class speaking anxiety, accompanied by a non-significant but directionally positive trend in in-class anxiety, suggests that the program's communicative tasks had a meaningful impact on students' comfort with English use beyond the classroom. The finding is consistent with Topçu and Başbay (2020), who demonstrated that collaborative activities reduce out-of-class speaking anxiety, and with Hammad (2020), who linked presentation-based tasks to increased speaking confidence.

The non-significant self-efficacy gains are interpretable within the context of participants' pre-existing language proficiency. Students who had already completed a university English preparatory program entered the course at the B1+ level, and prior research consistently demonstrates that higher-proficiency learners exhibit ceiling effects on self-efficacy measures (Tılfarlıoğlu & Cinkara, 2009; İspınar Akçayoğlu et al., 2019). A longitudinal follow-up study—assessing students' self-efficacy at graduation and after their first year of professional employment—would provide a more ecologically valid test of the program's longer-term impact.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

This chapter has presented a theoretically grounded, methodologically robust evaluation of an ESP program at a Turkish engineering faculty, guided by the Illuminative Evaluation Model. The findings collectively portray a program that is largely effective in pursuing its stated goals: its objectives are appropriately calibrated to learner needs and clearly articulated; its content is coherent, relevant, and accessible; its teaching processes are varied, student-centered, and motivationally supportive; and its assessment instruments are aligned with learning goals and appreciated as formative learning tools. The program successfully reduced students' out-of-class speaking anxiety and generated consistently high student ratings across six of eight motivational study condition dimensions.

At the same time, the evaluation illuminated a set of areas requiring attention: the need to expand in-class practice time—particularly for written tasks—by extending the program duration or contact hours; the importance of clarifying ambiguous rubric criteria to ensure scoring equity; the logistical challenge of online partner selection for the job interview role-play; and the pedagogical opportunity presented by transitioning to face-to-face delivery to restore peer interaction and spontaneous participation.

6.2 Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered to program developers, instructors, and institutional administrators:

First, extending the program to two semesters or increasing weekly contact hours from four to six would allow more in-class guided practice, particularly for writing tasks, and reduce the time pressure that instructors identified as a constraint on depth of coverage.

Second, the rubric for Presentation 1 and 2 should be revised to operationalize the task achievement and topic knowledge criteria more precisely, eliminating overlap and introducing measurable behavioral anchors. The Statement of Purpose rubric should include a criterion for responsiveness to formative feedback.

Third, when online delivery is necessary, structured ice-breaker activities at the semester's outset can mitigate the social distance that inhibits participation. Mandatory attendance policies—including provisions for lesson recordings as supplementary rather than substitute access—may also help sustain engagement.

Fourth, the scholarship application scenario in the Statement of Purpose task may be removed if student uptake data confirm that it is rarely selected.

Alternatively, the scope could be narrowed to the two most frequently chosen scenarios (master's program and internship applications) to allow greater depth.

Fifth, the course booklet should be updated to include additional model texts—particularly for the CV, cover letter, and job interview sections—and to replace examples that participants identified as dated.

6.3 Implications for Research

This chapter contributes to a small but growing body of ESP program evaluation studies that apply theoretically grounded frameworks to assess program effectiveness in holistic terms. The application of the Illuminative Evaluation Model to an engineering faculty ESP context represents, to the authors' knowledge, a novel contribution to the literature in Türkiye. Future research might extend the present design in several productive directions: a longitudinal follow-up tracking graduates' self-efficacy and speaking confidence in professional settings; a comparative study contrasting online and face-to-face delivery of the same program; an employer-perspective study eliciting evaluations of graduates' communication competencies; and cross-institutional replications to examine whether findings generalize to other engineering ESP programs.

Acknowledgment

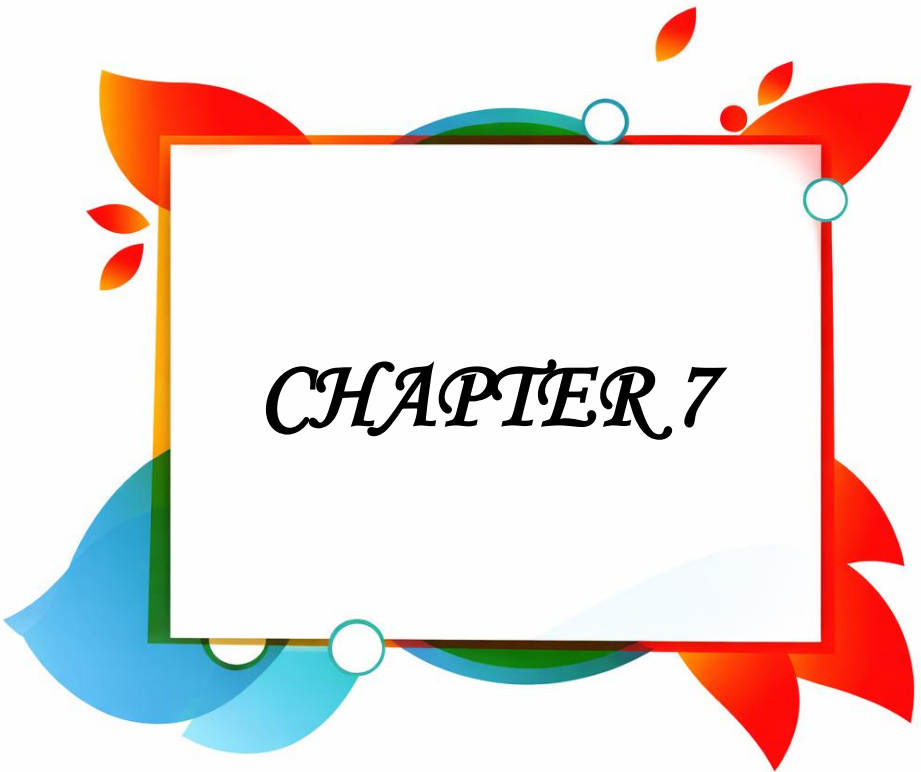
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CHAPTER 7

Artificial Intelligence as a Pedagogical Co-Teacher: Reconfiguring Learner Agency in Language Education

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Introduction

Although there have been increasing applications of AI in language education, studies on learner-AI interaction as an educational instrument have remained relatively rare. The role of AI in education, especially its involvement in tasks previously managed by educators and its effects on learners' lived experiences are under debate. Although AI is increasingly incorporated into instruction, there is insufficient phenomenological research on learners' lived experiences during such processes, limiting our understanding of how AI reshapes learning as a human experience (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2021). Earlier studies related to AI use in language learning were mostly consistent with either the cognitive or sociocultural paradigms (Holland et al., 1993; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Matthews, 1993). Yet, since language learning is an inherently social process, the development of AI that mimics conversations and offers feedback while not considering learners' situated conditions presents challenges regarding the authenticity of such interactions within the language learning context. This lack of insight limits current understandings of AI not only as a tool, but as a participant in learning processes (OECD, 2021). Specifically, while previous studies have mainly focused on the instrumental and functional perspectives on AI implementation, the experiential dimension of the learner-AI relationship has largely been ignored. As a result, this gap restricts the understanding of the reconceptualization of concepts such as agency, power dynamics, and meaning construction in AI-enabled settings.

Learners interact with AI systems to receive feedback and also to use languages outside of the classroom setting (OECD, 2021). Therefore, how students experience this phenomenon from their own perspective in relation to the use of AI systems as a co-teacher in education draw attention in the field (Ishaq et al., 2025; Taskarayevna et al., 2026). Indeed, co-teaching is emerged as a pedagogical approach that fosters positive teacher interactions, shared

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responsibility, and collaboration among educators (Sasson & Malkinson, 2021). Research highlights its ability to enhance teaching effectiveness, stimulate curriculum innovation, cultivate inclusive learning environments, and improve student engagement and learning outcomes. This approach allows the study to transform from merely looking at AI systems as auxiliary tools into considering them as participants in the learning process. The other point is reconceptualization of AI as a pedagogical co-teacher and its extension as the theory of distributed pedagogical agency in language learning, thereby offering a new perspective on how agency is negotiated between human and artificial actors (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Williamson & Eynon, 2020).

Learner agency is reconsidered in this research as an activity involving not only human but also artificial intelligence agents. With an emphasis on distributed pedagogical agency, it becomes evident in this research that learning does not take place within the individual learner but results from interactions between various agents – both human and non-human. In doing so, this theoretical framework challenges prevailing human-centered approaches to language acquisition (Hwang et al., 2020; Hwang & Chen, 2023; Yang et al., 2021). Therefore, this research aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do learners experience the use of AI as a co-teacher in foreign language classes?
2. How do learners conceptualize AI in terms of motivation, autonomy, and engagement?
3. What challenges emerge in the use of AI in learning processes, and what tensions arise in relation to authority, authenticity, and ethical considerations?

AI in Language Learning

Systems of rules and computer-assisted language testing have historically shaped the relationship between artificial intelligence and language acquisition, and they continue to do so. Current research trends focus on the influence of language models and generative artificial intelligence on language acquisition. Earlier research extensively examined the impact of AI on writing assessment (Godwin-Jones, 2022; Liu, et al., 2023; Sanosi, 2022; Walker, 2019) and grammatical error correction, viewing AI as a support for learners (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Moreover, evidence indicates that AI can improve communication by acting both as an informational source and as a conversational partner for language learners. At the same time, limitations associated with AI development include inaccuracies in generated texts (Cheng, 2025) and the risk of learner overdependence on AI tools (Abarzosa & Balaba, 2025, Duhaylungsod & Chavez, 2023; Khlaif et al., 2025; Koos & Wachsmann, 2023; Zhai et al., 2024). Such issues may affect learners' attitudes towards

machine-generated language and the reliability of information. One of the problems characteristic of existing literature is the lack of consideration of learners' lived experiences with artificial intelligence tools. In most cases, research focuses on the functional properties of the technology, such as efficiency and accuracy, while the experiential dimension of human–AI interaction remains underexplored. Therefore, significant gaps in understanding this phenomenon persist. Due to recent developments in AI and its increased usage, there is an evident need to transition from focusing on functional capabilities to examining human–AI interaction. This is especially important in the case of generative AI, where learners' experiences are central to understanding human–machine interaction (Kasneci et al., 2023; Rudolph et al., 2023).

AI and its Interaction from Sociocultural Viewpoints

Research on AI and language acquisition are often based on cognitive and sociocultural frameworks. Interactions is a central aspect of language learning and contribute significantly to the process of developing language competencies. From the perspective of cognitive theory, artificial intelligence is seen as an auxiliary instrument which can enhance language skills through feedback.

In terms of the sociocultural theory, learning is viewed as situated interaction influenced by certain cultural factors, while communication itself acts as the major vehicle of meaning-making (Kramsch, 1998). Artificial intelligence technology has resulted in the emergence of innovative forms of interactions that resemble dialogue but do not provide a cultural context like the human interaction does. Although the difference between human interactions and computer-generated interactions is obvious, its possible effects on the learning experience remain unstudied, mainly concerning motivation and engagement. One of the possible directions for further investigation should be learners' attitudes toward their understanding of these differences. There certainly exist some differences; however, they remain underexplored.

Learning Effectiveness and Autonomy through AI

The concept of motivation is one of the most important aspects of computer-aided language learning because of the correlation between this term and independent learning which encompasses self-control and monitoring. AI-assisted language learning provides feedback and information for students, contributing to their independence and personalizing their learning process. Nevertheless, students' engagement can be influenced by dependence on assistance from outside. Although computer use is commonly connected with increased self-confidence, research shows that technology can also lead to disengagement from educational activities (Horwitz, 2010; Fryer et al., 2017). These results reveal a contradiction between autonomy and dependency in computer-based learning. It is important to examine how these opposing dynamics can be balanced. Nonetheless, modern studies tend to perceive

autonomy as an individual's cognitive trait without paying attention to the possibility of changing autonomy by interacting with AI technology. It is necessary to reconsider autonomy as a relational construct that arises from interaction between humans and AI. Limited research has explored the relationships among learner autonomy, engagement, and strategy use.

Critical Digital Literacy, Ethics and AI

The implementation of AI in the educational sphere has ethical implications related to privacy, algorithmic discrimination, and changes in educators' roles when using technology (Hauck, 2017; Holmes et al., 2021; Selwyn, 2019). The use of learners' personal and behavioral data in the field of language acquisition also creates additional ethical concerns (Abd-Alrazaq et al., 2023; Dergaa et al., 2023; Duhaylungsod & Chavez, 2023; Koos & Wachsmann, 2023; Williamson & Eynon, 2020). AI has been widely discussed in the scientific literature. Nevertheless, it is recognized that learners should acquire critical digital literacy skills to assess different types of digital technologies (Ismail, 2023; Kim et al., 2023; Bilki et al., 2023). However, empirical studies examining learners' perspectives on ethical issues related to AI use remain scarce. Research on learners' encounters with ethical dilemmas in relation to the application of artificial intelligence is insufficient. In particular, there is a lack of studies exploring the way in which people understand and resolve ethical questions that arise when using AI technology, suggesting that ethics require both recognition and experience. Thus, more research needs to be done in this area.

Roles of AI as a Potential Co-Teacher

Language teaching using artificial intelligence has become an important area of academic research. However, there are many issues related to the application of AI technology in this sphere that have been inadequately studied by scholars. In fact, current studies largely focus on issues such as efficiency, effectiveness, and learner engagement. Advances in technologies have further emphasized the significance of these factors since modern AI can create educational materials, assess learner performance, facilitate independent learning, and help students understand difficult concepts (Ishaq et al., 2025; Sasson & Malkinson, 2021; Taskarayevna et al., 2026). Therefore, AI is now perceived not only as a tool but also as an active participant in the learning process. Even with this transition, research on the experience of learners using AI as an instructional co-agent is scant, especially as concerns negotiations about authority, agency, and authenticity when dealing with AI technology. There has been a significant increase in the use of AI in teaching practices, but research on this topic is still lacking. However, empirical research examining learners' experiences in this regard remains limited. In this context, the present study examines AI as a co-teacher in language learning, drawing on the concept of distributed pedagogical agency.

Methodology

Since the proposed epistemology suggest that an interpretivist approach should be adopted to study human experience, a hermeneutic and phenomenological design is considered appropriate. Unlike positivists, who view meaning as something objective and measurable, interpretivists claim that meaning arises from the lived experiences of individuals. In this study, meaning is derived from learners' experiences of working with AI-based software in language learning contexts. The basis for the interpretive design is found in the philosophy of Van Manen (2016), according to which interpretivism, hermeneutics, and phenomenology do not represent different epistemologies, but constitute a unified interpretive perspective that may be used in analyzing different human experiences. Moreover, when studying cognitive and emotional experiences that often overlap, an interpretivist approach is particularly applicable. In terms of methodology, a qualitative approach is considered the most appropriate, since the human experience of using emerging technologies in language learning can hardly be adequately measured through quantitative means.

Regarding the participants, a total number of 25 undergraduate students from a state university, Adana, Türkiye participated in this study ($N = 25$). A purposive, criterion-based sampling strategy was employed and students with no experience using AI-based technology were excluded. Initially, a total of 32 participants were chosen; however, since seven out of them did not meet the criteria for selection, a sample size of 25 participants was finally used ($N = 25$). The final sample consisted of 25 students ($N = 25$), including 14 female participants ($n = 14$) and 11 male participants ($n = 11$), aged between 18 and 24. In terms of language proficiency, participants' language skills ranged from B1 to B2 and they had been using AI as a language learning tool for at least three months.

Data were gathered over a ten-week period via interviews, reflective journaling, and non-participant classroom observations. Triangulation was used to enhance the validity of the findings and to provide a deeper understanding of learners' experiences. The individual interviews lasted between 35 minutes and 55 minutes, and focused on participants' use of AI and its role in their language learning processes. Semi-structured interviews were employed to facilitate flexibility in examining participants' perspectives. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and then translated into English. Moreover, all participants kept reflective journals throughout the research period. Six classroom observations were conducted outside the participant group, and field notes were taken to document interactions and AI usage during these observations. The observations took place in a non-participant setting and involved a semi-structured approach. The main focus of observations involved the pattern of

learners' interactions, application of AI technologies, and classroom dynamics as far as AI implementation is concerned.

The data analysis was done through collecting interviews, reflective journals, and classroom observations. Reflective thematic analysis was carried out by following the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2022). The process commenced with familiarization with the data through careful reading. An inductive approach was employed to develop themes emerging from participants' descriptions. Subsequently, codes were reviewed, interpreted, and refined to generate broader themes that best represented the data, with coding conducted iteratively to ensure consistency across data sources. As part of the coding procedure, initial codes were created by using the meaning units taken from the data provided by participants. These codes were later put into categories and eventually resulted in themes. While analyzing the data, special attention was paid to the descriptions and interpretations offered by participants of their experiences, emotional reactions, feelings of self-efficacy, and processes of making sense of their experiences. In line with the methodological framework of the study, the goal of analysis was to identify the essence of participants' experience of living with AI.

Reflexivity was consistently applied to critically examine the researchers' assumptions and their potential influence on data interpretation. Reflexive notes were continuously taken in order to examine researchers' assumptions and evaluate their impact on the interpretation of the data. Such insights informed their ongoing analytical decisions, which facilitated the researchers' ability to set aside their preconceived ideas and be receptive to the participants' point of view.

Data from interviews, memos, and notes were compared separately to determine whether there were patterns of both convergence and divergence among data sources. NVivo 12 was utilized to organize and code the data systematically.

The aspects ensuring that the results of the study met the criteria of rigor include validity, transferability, reliability, and verifiability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Firstly, prolonged engagement, triangulation of sources used to collect data, and participants' validation of the interview transcripts helped to establish the validity of the results. Transferability was increased by providing detailed descriptions of the context under study and information about all participants, which allowed for the evaluation of the applicability of the results to other cases. The clear interpretability of the protocol used to review the literature played an important role in ensuring the reliability of the results. Verifiability of the results was ensured by applying reflective practices and peer review. Trustworthiness was ensured through established qualitative criteria, including credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmability.

All participants provided informed consent after receiving detailed information about the study. Confidentiality of participant data was maintained throughout the research process. Participants were made aware of how AI-generated text functions, especially with regard to ethical considerations and copyright. Participation was voluntary, they were informed to withdraw whenever they would like to and their active participation did not affect their grades.

Findings

The findings are identified within four major themes: (1) motivation as non-judgmental engagement; (2) negotiations of authority and authenticity; (3) agency and emergent dependency; and (4) ambivalence towards the ethical and emotional implications of AI use as given in detail below.

Motivation as Non-Judgmental Engagement

One of the major themes across participants' responses was the reduced sense of pressure in the absence of judgment. In traditional classroom environments, learners often experience pressure when the educator assumes an evaluative role. According to participants, AI was perceived as preferable because it is non-judgmental. One participant stated: *"AI motivates me because I don't feel judged"* (P3, interview). Some participants reported engaging with AI more frequently than with other people. For instance, one participant noted: *"AI is always there"* (P9, journal). The other participant asserted: *"AI was so fast that it gave me relaxation about timing to finish my assignments"* (P11, interview). Other similar accounts illustrate forms of engagement with AI that may not be easily achieved in conventional classroom settings. Some participants articulated that *"AI was politely answering my question and giving options more than needed"* (P23, interview). These findings indicate that conditions for engagement are reconfigured in ways that facilitate participation by reducing perceived barriers. Nevertheless, increased participation does not necessarily correspond to deeper engagement. Some participants expressed ambivalence toward this perceived freedom, as reflected in the response: *"It is easier but less real"* (P7, P16 interview). This is significant, as participation does not necessarily lead to meaningful engagement. *"I do not know whether AI is suitable for this situation"* (P15, journal). Although AI creates opportunities for increased participation, it does not consistently support deeper forms of engagement.

Negotiation of Authority and Authenticity

Conflicting instructions from various sources became one of the most frequently cited practical problems for participants. As mentioned, one participant commented, *"I receive one piece of advice from AI and another from my teacher"* (P8, interview). Moreover, another participant explained that s/he chose which of the sources to follow: *"It depends on the situation; sometimes I*

use AI, and sometimes I listen to the teachers" (P11, journal). Importantly, learners did not automatically trust AI. Despite being accurate, some of the answers were considered inappropriate. For instance, one participant pointed out that, even though the response was correct, *"I do not know whether AI is suitable for this situation"* (P18, interview). Some others recorded *"I do not feel comfortable about my level, sometimes it gives statements below my level"* (P18, P2, journal). Some participants emphasized *"I do like words that I am offered to use. It is nice to learn. But sometimes there is a long list for me to feel confused which one is more appropriate in my mother language. Examples are not easy to understand"* (P13, P22, P8 interview). These findings reveal conflict about utilizing AI for the participants. In other words, participants regarded AI as just one more source among many that should be critically evaluated according to the situation.

Agency and Emerging Dependency

As for dependency, participants' attitudes were rather ambiguous. On the one hand, there were those who believed that AI made them more active learners because learning became independent of the teacher's presence: *"I can learn anytime I want without any dependence on the teacher,"* said a participant (P5, journal). However, there were also participants who raised the problem of dependency on AI. For instance, a participant mentioned that *"sometimes I use the answer provided by AI"* (P11, interview). Another participant stated that sometimes they used AI too hastily and did not think independently: *"Sometimes I use AI very rapidly without thinking"* (P22, journal). Additionally, some participants underlined that *"sometimes I use AI and searching new things drives me to spend more time than I have planned"* (P7, interview).

These examples indicate that AI may reduce the cognitive effort necessary for learning; however, dependency is not determined solely by technology use. Learners can use AI for evaluating their work without substituting critical thinking. Hence, whether AI will be beneficial in terms of agency depends on its integration into language-learning activities. Even if they complain about spending more time during their learning process, in long term, they acquire knowledge that they stored in their mental storage. This approach leads them to gain information to use in their future career, as well.

Ethical and Emotional Ambivalence

Participants' attitudes toward AI were notably ambivalent. Although learners acknowledged the advantages of learning a language with the help of AI, they had concerns that were hard to express clearly but nevertheless persisted. *"It works fine, but on the other hand, I somehow feel afraid of AI,"* stated one of the participants (P13, interview). In some cases, concerns were associated with privacy issues in AI-driven software, as claimed by another participant: *"Where does my data go? I am afraid of privacy issues"* (P20, interview). Moreover,

participants were worried about the possibility of being replaced by AI in the future: *"I wonder if AI will replace teachers in the future,"* one participant stated (P6, journal). In the same vein, some participants underlined that *"sometimes I feel scared that AI took my foreign language power and make me lazier. I am afraid of not finding job in the future because I lose my language power"* (P2, P21 interview).

In summary, regardless of the topic, participants did not see AI as an unbiased part of their educational activity. On the contrary, the presence of AI raised questions that learners found difficult to answer. In each of these four categories, the role of artificial intelligence in education is not seen as a mere tool used by the learner, but as an integral part of the educational experience. However, in addition to reducing anxiety and increasing flexibility and accessibility, artificial intelligence also poses challenges related to authenticity, dependence, and ethics. The interdependencies of various components of AI-based education are presented in the following table below.

Table 1. Learner Experiences and Tensions in AI-Supported Language Learning

Theme	Core Experience	Underlying Tension
Motivation	Reduced anxiety and increased participation	Engagement vs authenticity
Authority	Conflicting feedback between AI d teachers	Accuracy vs contextual legitimacy
Agency	Increased autonomy and flexible access	Autonomy vs cognitive outsourcing
Ethics	Simultaneous trust and concern	Empowerment vs vulnerability

As displayed in Table 1, learners’ experiences with AI reveal a constellation of interrelated tensions. With respect to motivation, the reduction in anxiety and increased participation stem from the non-judgmental nature of AI; however, these conditions simultaneously raise questions about the authenticity of learners’ engagement, as it remains unclear whether participation reflects meaningful interaction. In terms of authority, conflicting feedback from AI and instructors creates a tension between accuracy and contextual appropriateness, indicating that knowledge cannot be passively accepted but must be critically evaluated by learners. Regarding autonomy, enhanced independence and flexible access are accompanied by the risk of cognitive outsourcing, potentially reducing learners’ critical engagement. Finally, in the ethical domain, tensions emerge from the coexistence of trust and concern in learners’ perceptions of AI.

Table 2. Analytical Interpretation and Pedagogical Implications in AI-Supported Language Learning

Theme	Analytical Interpretation	Pedagogical Implication
Motivation	Motivation emerges through the absence of social evaluation	AI supports participation but may weaken socially grounded interaction
Authority	Epistemic authority is negotiated across sources	Teachers act as mediators of meaning and context
Agency	Agency is reconfigured through reliance on AI	Learners need support for critical engagement
Ethics	AI produces both confidence and uncertainty	Ethical awareness must be integrated into learning

As presented in Table 2, the analytical interpretation of these tensions points to a set of pedagogical implications that extend beyond the functional use of AI in education. In terms of motivation, the emergence of engagement through the absence of social evaluation suggests that while AI can facilitate participation, it may also weaken socially situated interaction, thereby requiring pedagogical designs that reintroduce meaningful social engagement. Regarding authority, the negotiation of epistemic authority across AI and human sources underscores the need for teachers to act as mediators who contextualize and validate knowledge rather than merely transmit it. In relation to agency, the reconfiguration of learner autonomy through reliance on AI highlights the importance of fostering critical engagement, ensuring that learners do not substitute independent thinking with automated assistance. Finally, the ethical dimension reveals that AI simultaneously generates confidence and uncertainty, indicating that ethical awareness should be systematically integrated into language learning practices. Overall, these implications suggest that effective AI integration requires not only technological adoption but also pedagogical transformation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study reveals the use of AI in language teaching and learning by considering the possibility of approaching AI not only as an instrument of instruction but also as a pedagogical agent that actively reconfigures the circumstances of learning. The discussion is particularly elaborated in relation to the domain of experience, relations, and interpretation of learner–AI interaction, dealing with issues that are not directly concerned with academic success, thus extending the prevailing body of research. These findings align with recent discussions of AI as a socio-technical actor in educational settings (Kasneci et al., 2023; Rudolph et al., 2023; Williamson & Eynon, 2020). More importantly, the findings suggest a shift in how learning itself is conceptualized in AI-mediated environments. This study reconceptualizes learner agency as a distributed process involving human and AI agents. The results more strongly point toward a move

from considering learning as a cognitive activity to a relational and distributed activity in AI-mediated spaces.

To start with, the results reveal the presence of certain contradictions between two levels—(a) AI as a facilitator of learning and as an instructional instrument, which cannot be explained solely in terms of (b) functionality. For instance, the hypothesis that learners see the central aim of learning as escaping social evaluation (anxiety), and that the anxiety-ameliorating function of AI leads learners to regard AI-assisted learning as something other than what would be conventionally perceived as a socially valuable activity, is supported.

There is a contradiction in that learners' perceptions are not consistent with the traditional assumption that learners accept information from AI without skepticism; in fact, it is shown that learners who have the ability to compare information from AI and teachers are able to reach conclusions about which source is more trustworthy. These findings challenge the assumption that AI functions as an authoritative knowledge source, suggesting instead that authority is dynamically negotiated. Accordingly, epistemic authority cannot be considered as a characteristic of artificial intelligence, and information created using AI cannot be considered authentic by default. Rather, it depends on the process of evaluation carried out by the learners based on their capability to evaluate the AI-created information.

The study offers a detailed analysis of the role of learner autonomy. Results show the presence of evidence that reveals that AI may help to encourage learners to interact with different information resources while developing more autonomy. However, some elements imply a possible sense of dependence on the use of AI technologies as control appears to be an element linking humans and AI. It should be noted that AI cannot just be seen as a tool; it also acts as a co-agent in meaning making processes.

The discussion by the participants on the application of AI technology in language acquisition involves practical, emotional, and moral aspects. Learners expressed issues relating to data security, accuracy of answers from AI, and the likelihood of AI replacing humans. These results reveal the importance of engaging in reflection about the use of AI technologies in language education. In this context, AI represents both a source of knowledge and a teaching tool at the same time; however, there are issues related to trust and dependence on technology.

Finally, learning and knowledge transfer can be attributed not only to human beings but also to non-human beings. Distributed pedagogical agency represents one of the important theoretical contributions of this research project, where learning is seen as the consequence of a collaboration of human and artificial agents. Artificial intelligence should not be regarded as a mere tool but as an ally in the learning process.

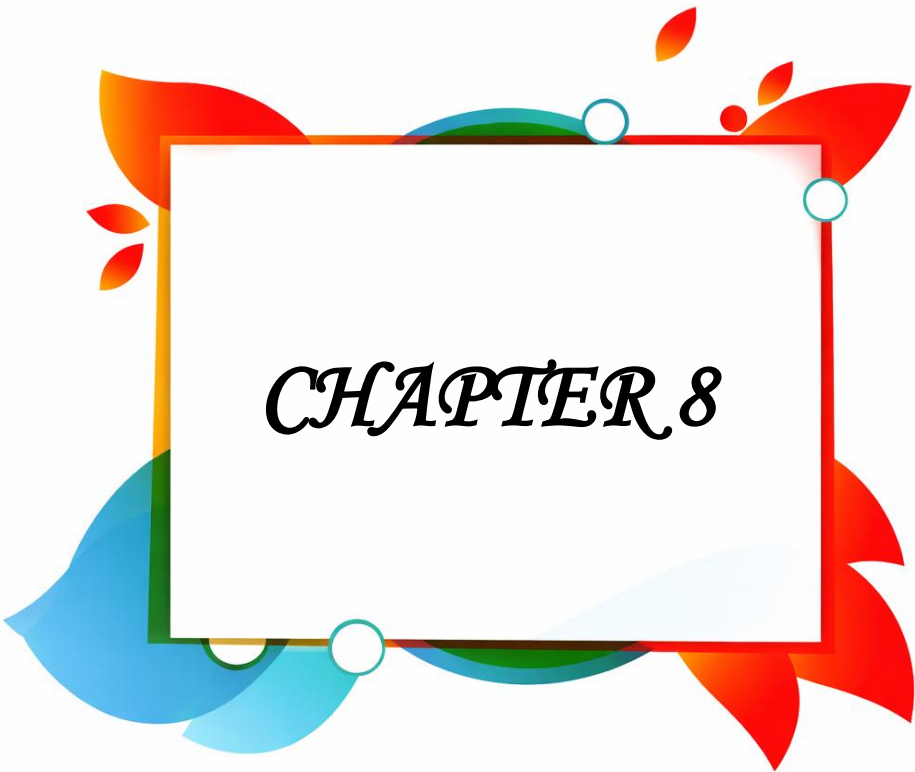
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CHAPTER 8

Offloading Cognition, Preserving Phronesis: A Phronetic–Distributed Learning Model

Harun Serpil¹

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, has re-emerged as a central concern for education, ethics, and leadership in the twenty-first century. As artificial intelligence (AI), algorithmic decision-making, and digital technologies reshape how people live, learn, and act, the pressing question becomes how to preserve and cultivate the distinctly human capacity for wise judgment in contexts that are increasingly mediated by machines. This question gains urgency precisely because the technologies now entering classrooms and workplaces do not merely deliver information. They perform acts of judgment that were once the exclusive province of human deliberation, and in doing so they alter the very conditions under which judgment itself is learned (Eisikovits & Feldman, 2022).

For education the stakes are especially high. Schools and universities have long emphasized the acquisition of knowledge (*episteme*) and the mastery of technical competence (*techne*). Yet neither of these, alone or together, ensures that learners are prepared to act wisely in complex and ethically charged situations. Teaching, clinical practice, and leadership, often described as burdened professions, demand more than the ability to apply rules or execute procedures. They require the discernment to navigate unpredictable contexts, to balance competing values, and to act in ways that foster human flourishing (Kristjánsson, 2024; Yacek & Jonas, 2025). Schwartz and Sharpe (2010) document how the steady displacement of judgment by rules and incentives has hollowed out exactly these professions, leaving practitioners with checklists where discernment is needed. A teacher deciding whether to intervene in a sensitive classroom conflict, a clinician weighing an algorithmic recommendation against the lived reality of a patient, and a school leader reconciling efficiency-driven policy with the relational needs of staff each face a situation in which technical expertise and digital tools cannot substitute for judgment that is ethical, context-sensitive, and oriented toward the good of others.

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What is new is the speed and reach of the systems to which such judgment can now be delegated. Generative AI can summarize a literature, draft an argument, and recommend a decision in seconds, and early evidence suggests that heavy reliance on these systems is associated with reduced critical engagement. In a survey of 319 knowledge workers, higher confidence in AI predicted less critical thinking and lower cognitive effort (Lee et al., 2025), and a mixed-methods study of 666 participants found a significant negative association between frequent AI use and critical thinking, mediated by cognitive offloading (Gerlich, 2025). These findings extend a longer line of research on the cognitive costs of externalizing memory and computation (Sparrow et al., 2011). The worry is not the tools themselves but what their habitual use may do to the capacities education exists to build.

This chapter responds by proposing the Phronetic–Distributed Learning Model, an integrative framework that brings together micro-skills, the building blocks of professional competence; cognitive offloading, the use of external tools and technologies to extend cognition; and phronesis, the ethical orientation and contextual judgment that secures flourishing. Drawing on Aristotelian virtue ethics, pragmatist philosophy of education, and distributed cognition theory, the model positions phronesis as the encompassing horizon within which skills and technologies must be cultivated and applied. The discussion moves from the philosophical and psychological foundations of phronesis, through the theory of cognitive offloading and the risk it poses, to the model itself and its implications for education, leadership, and research.

2. PHRONESIS: FROM ARISTOTLE TO A WORKING CONSTRUCT

2.1. The Aristotelian Conception of Practical Wisdom

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* remains the point of departure for any account of phronesis. Aristotle distinguishes practical wisdom from two other intellectual excellences. *Episteme* is theoretical knowledge of what is universal and necessary. *Techne* is the know-how involved in making or producing an artifact according to a method. Phronesis is neither. It is the cultivated capacity to deliberate well about what is good for oneself and others, and to act accordingly, in particular and variable circumstances (Aristotle, 1999). Because the situations that call for practical wisdom are contingent and shifting, phronesis cannot be reduced to a fixed body of rules. It requires sensitivity to the salient particulars of a case and the ability to determine what this situation, here and now, demands. This irreducibility to rule is the feature that makes phronesis difficult to teach and easy to lose. Unlike a theorem, which can be transmitted intact, or a technique, which can be specified as a procedure, phronesis is acquired only through the repeated and situated exercise of judgment under the guidance of those who already possess it. Wherever the occasions for situated judgment are removed, the conditions for cultivating practical wisdom are removed with them.

For Aristotle the human good is *eudaimonia*, commonly rendered as flourishing or living well, achieved through rational activity in accordance with virtue across a complete life. Phronesis occupies a privileged place in this account because it guides and unifies the virtues of character (Kristjánsson, 2023). Courage, temperance, justice, and generosity each concern a domain of feeling or action, but none of them tells the agent how much, when, toward whom, and for what end. That coordinating work belongs to practical wisdom, and the Aristotelian thesis of the unity of the virtues makes the dependence explicit: no virtue of character can be fully possessed in isolation, because the correct exercise of any one of them depends on the discernment that phronesis supplies (Smith & Vickers, 2024). For this reason phronesis is best understood not as one virtue among others but as an intellectual meta-virtue, a higher-order excellence whose function is to organize and direct the rest. This meta-status is what later allows the framework developed here to treat phronesis as an orienting horizon rather than as a discrete skill.

The Aristotelian conception is sharpened by contrast with its rivals. Platonic readings privilege contemplative, theoretical knowledge and risk an ethical detachment from the texture of everyday experience, while Machiavellian readings reduce wisdom to cunning, treating practical intelligence as instrumental calculation in the service of power (Girado-Sierra et al., 2024). Influential modern alternatives fare little better. Principlist and consequentialist approaches tend to oscillate between being too vague to give concrete guidance and too rigid to accommodate genuinely novel situations, including those introduced by AI (Smith & Vickers, 2024). Against all of these, the Aristotelian account foregrounds habituated judgment, emotional attunement, and an orientation toward the good life. These are precisely the features that resist codification, and therefore the features most exposed when judgment is delegated to systems that operate by rule and by pattern.

2.2. Operationalizing Phronesis: The Four-Componential Model and the Place of Action

If phronesis is to inform educational practice and research, it must be specified precisely enough to be studied. The decisive step was the neo-Aristotelian synthesis advanced by Darnell, Gulliford, Kristjánsson, and Paris (2019), which reconstructed practical wisdom as a multi-component construct capable of bridging the long-standing gap between moral knowledge and moral action. This was developed into a fuller psychological account of phronesis as a form of contextual integrative thinking (Kristjánsson et al., 2021; Kristjánsson & Fowers, 2024), moving phronesis from a philosophical ideal toward an operationalizable model suitable for instrument design and educational intervention.

On this account phronesis comprises four functions. The *constitutive function* is the perceptual capacity to recognize the morally salient features of a situation,

to see what is ethically at stake before deliberation begins. The *blueprint function* is an overarching conception of the good life that orients deliberation and gives it direction. The *emotional regulative function* is the capacity to bring one's emotions into alignment with reasoned judgment, including the meta-emotional regulation of one's own affective responses (Kristjánsson, 2023). The *integrative or adjudicative function* is the capacity to weigh conflicting considerations and to arrive at an all-things-considered judgment about what is to be done. Taken together, these functions show that phronesis is at once cognitive and affective, rational and emotional, rather than a purely intellectual faculty.

A reasonable objection is that this model omits an explicit action component, even though Aristotle defines phronesis as the capacity to deliberate well and to act accordingly. If practical wisdom is reduced to contextual thinking, it risks becoming a purely internal process, at odds with its practical character (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). The framework adopted here meets the objection by treating the adjudicative function not as the terminus of phronesis but as the point at which deliberation issues in reasoned choice, what Aristotle calls *prohairesis*, which in turn activates the relevant skill. On this reading practical wisdom does not float free of action; it reaches into competence and directs its exercise. The decision to listen rather than lecture, to write a passage unaided rather than delegate it, or to override an algorithmic recommendation is the visible expression of an adjudicative judgment. There remains genuine debate about whether action is internal to phronesis or its downstream effect, but for the purposes of this model the weaker and less contested claim suffices: practical wisdom is answerable to what the agent actually does.

This analytic vocabulary clarifies how the elements of the Phronetic–Distributed Learning Model intersect. Micro-skills sharpen the constitutive function, since trained perception and attentive listening help the practitioner identify ethically salient cues. Cognitive offloading bears most directly on the regulative and adjudicative functions, which it can either support or erode depending on whether the technology augments human judgment or substitutes for it. The four functions thus become the hinges on which the layers of the model turn.

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: VIRTUE, HABIT, AND DISTRIBUTED MIND

3.1. Virtue Ethics and Pragmatist Inquiry

The model draws on three traditions. The first, Aristotelian virtue ethics, contributes the claim that moral and intellectual excellence develops through the repeated and situated exercise of judgment. Eisikovits and Feldman (2022) draw out the consequence that matters most for education in an age of AI: if phronesis is honed incrementally through the habitual exercise of practical judgment, and if algorithmic systems increasingly take over the everyday judgments through

which that honing occurs, then the automation of judgment threatens to erode the very conditions of moral development. Vallor's account of technomoral virtue sharpens the point. The character traits needed to live well with emerging technologies must themselves be cultivated under technosocial conditions that are simultaneously reshaping the possibilities for cultivating them (Vallor, 2016). In her later work she warns that systems built to mirror human outputs can flatter us into mistaking fluent imitation for understanding, and so into ceding capacities we have not realized we are losing (Vallor, 2024). Virtue ethics thus supplies both the goal of the framework and its central worry.

The second tradition, pragmatist philosophy of education, complements the first. John Dewey held that education unfolds through cycles of action, reflection, and the reconstruction of experience in response to uncertainty (Dewey, 1938/1997). This resonates with Aristotle's account of *phronesis* as the wise navigation of particulars, but it situates that navigation within problem-solving and democratic life. Dewey's notion of habit provides the crucial bridge to the idea of micro-skills. Habits, for Dewey, are not mechanical routines but flexible and intelligent dispositions, refined through repeated engagement and answerable to the situations in which they are deployed. Understood this way, micro-skills are not ends in themselves but elements within a broader process of inquiry that is itself guided by *phronesis*. A teacher's ability to paraphrase a student's contribution or to pose a probing question is not a free-standing technique; it is a habit exercised within an ethical horizon, supporting growth, fostering fairness, and responding adaptively to context.

3.2. Distributed Cognition and the Extended Mind

The third tradition, distributed cognition, holds that human thinking is not confined to the individual brain but extends across people, tools, and environments (Hutchins, 1995). On the extended-mind thesis, an external artifact that plays the right functional role in a cognitive process can count as a genuine part of that process (Clark & Chalmers, 1998). Learners constantly offload cognitive demands onto external supports: taking notes, using calculators, consulting databases, and increasingly delegating tasks to AI systems. This expands the reach of human performance, which is why distributed cognition is rightly regarded as a resource rather than a deficiency.

Yet the same mechanism carries a risk. When information is reliably available outside the mind, people encode less of it internally and instead remember where to find it, the effect Sparrow and colleagues documented in their study of having information at our fingertips (Sparrow et al., 2011). What is adaptive for memory becomes hazardous when the offloaded function is judgment rather than recall, because reliance on an external system can supplant rather than support the capacity it stands in for (Eisikovits & Feldman, 2022). Distributed cognition therefore enters the framework as a double-edged resource. It explains both why

offloading is cognitively powerful and why it is ethically hazardous, and it sets up the central problem of the next section: distinguishing the offloading that extends human judgment from the offloading that quietly replaces it.

4. COGNITIVE OFFLOADING AND THE EROSION OF JUDGMENT

4.1. Offloading and Deskilling: Two Kinds of Delegation

Cognitive offloading is the use of external action or resources to reduce the information-processing demands of a task (Risko & Gilbert, 2016). The behaviors it names are ordinary and pervasive: tilting one's head to read rotated text, setting a reminder, querying a search engine. What gives the concept its contemporary edge is the scale and sophistication of the systems now available. When the external resource is a generative AI system capable of producing arguments, drafting text, and recommending decisions, offloading shifts from relieving memory and computation to delegating deliberation itself. Risko and Gilbert observe that the decision to offload is governed by metacognitive evaluations of one's own abilities, and that these evaluations are frequently inaccurate, so learners may offload more, and more consequential, cognitive work than is good for their development while believing they have judged the trade-off well.

It helps to distinguish two kinds of offloading that the single term obscures. *Structural offloading* delegates data management, formatting, retrieval, and computation, tasks that relieve memory and processing without displacing judgment. *Deliberative offloading* delegates context appraisal, interpretation, synthesis, and the weighing of values, tasks that are themselves acts of judgment. The distinction matters because the two carry very different risks. Structural offloading typically frees attention for higher-order work, and a calculator or a citation manager rarely threatens practical wisdom. Deliberative offloading is where the danger concentrates, because delegating an interpretation or an evaluative choice pre-empts the very judgment that phronesis is meant to exercise.

Recent evidence gives this concern empirical weight. In Gerlich's (2025) mixed-methods study of 666 participants, frequent AI use was significantly and negatively associated with critical thinking, with cognitive offloading as the mediating mechanism, and the effect was strongest among younger users. In a survey of 319 knowledge workers, Lee and colleagues (2025) found that the more participants trusted an AI system, the less critical thinking they reported enacting, and the more their effort shifted from producing work to verifying machine output. Longer-standing commentary anticipated the pattern, arguing that ubiquitous digital mediation reshapes attention and weakens the capacity for sustained, effortful thought (Carr, 2010). None of this implies that any single act of offloading is harmful. The concern is that the cumulative pattern of deliberative offloading reshapes which capacities are practiced and which are allowed to fall into disuse, producing an atrophy of judgment analogous to the

deskilling observed when professionals cede the knowledge of their craft to automated systems (Eisikovits & Feldman, 2022).

4.2. Technological Mediation, Artificial Phronesis, and Epistemic Heed

How a technology relates to practical wisdom is not fixed by the technology alone. Zelny (2025) offers a useful taxonomy, distinguishing relations that *augment* practical wisdom, by expanding the agent's deliberative and reflective capacities, from relations that *diminish* it, by reducing the agent's role to approving or rejecting machine-generated outputs, and relations that *displace* it, by removing the human from the deliberative loop so that only the end product remains. The displacing relation is the most corrosive, because virtue on the Aristotelian view rests in choosing an act for the sake of the noble (*kalon*), not merely in securing a result. A technology that delivers the result while bypassing the choice may improve outcomes in the short term while hollowing out the agent over the long term. The same tool can therefore stand in very different relations to phronesis depending on how it is designed and used, which is precisely why guidance is required.

A further question is whether AI systems might themselves possess or approximate phronesis. Sullins (2021) introduces the notion of artificial phronesis and distinguishes among ethical-impact agents, whose behavior merely has ethical consequences; rule-following ethical agents, which operate according to programmed constraints; and agents that might one day engage in genuinely contextual moral reasoning. Krzanowski and Polak (2025) argue that weak, domain-specific phronetic architectures may be feasible in narrow settings, while cautioning that full Aristotelian phronesis, with its embodied, emotionally attuned, and habituated character, may remain distinctively human. The convergent lesson is that AI may assist deliberation but cannot, at least for now, supply the lived practical wisdom that difficult cases require. For education this reinforces rather than relaxes the demand to cultivate human phronesis, since learners who lean on systems that lack practical wisdom risk outsourcing judgment to tools incapable of exercising it.

The practical question for learners can be stated as a contrast between two principles. A principle of epistemic deference holds that, because AI may often be more reliable than human judgment, one should defer to its outputs wherever feasible in order to maximize correct decisions. Tsai and Ku (2025) argue that such deference, however attractive on narrowly consequentialist grounds, undermines the development of phronesis by removing the occasions on which judgment is exercised. In its place they propose a principle of epistemic heed: agents should exercise their own rational capacities as fully as possible while heeding, that is, carefully considering, the outputs of AI without surrendering control to them. The finding that greater trust in AI tracks with less critical thinking (Lee et al., 2025) gives the contrast teeth. On this view, discrepancies

between human and machine judgment become occasions for learning rather than triggers for deference, and epistemic heed names the stance the Phronetic–Distributed Learning Model seeks to cultivate.

5. THE PHRONETIC–DISTRIBUTED LEARNING MODEL

5.1. A Layered Architecture

Bringing these strands together, the Phronetic–Distributed Learning Model conceives of learning as a set of nested layers (Figure 1). At the innermost core are micro-skills, the foundational practices of competence that can be explicitly taught and refined. Surrounding the core is cognitive offloading, where distributed resources extend human capacity while creating risks of over-reliance. Encompassing both is phronesis, the orienting horizon of practical wisdom that ensures micro-skills and offloading are exercised ethically, contextually, and in ways that sustain flourishing. The layers are not merely stacked: each inner layer is meant to be governed by the one that surrounds it, so that tool use is answerable to skill and both are answerable to wisdom. Two qualifications follow. First, the governing layer need not be supplied by the learner from the outset; in early development it is provided externally, a point developed in Section 5.3. Second, the boundaries between layers are better pictured as permeable regions than as rigid walls, since a single act can draw on more than one layer at once.

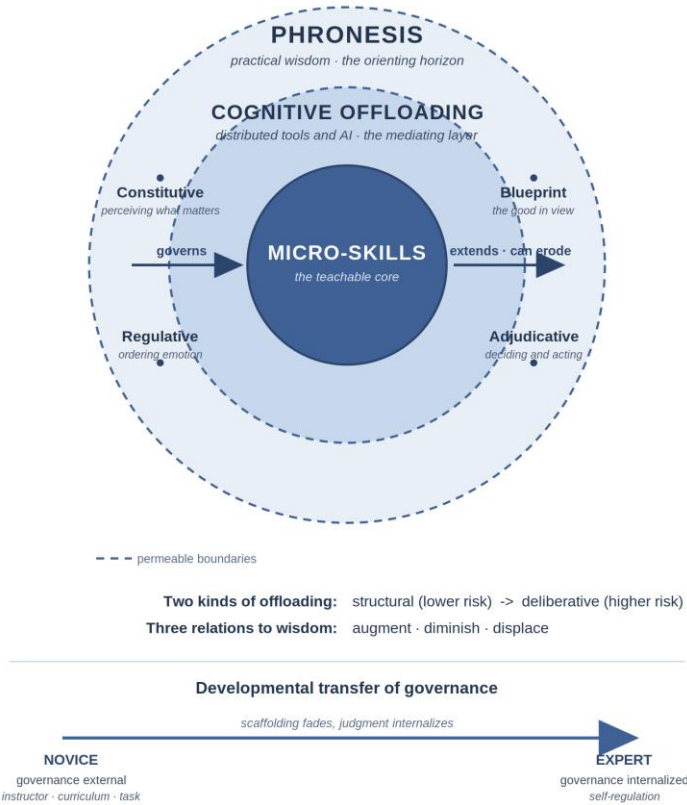


Figure 1. The Phronetic–Distributed Learning Model. Micro-skills form the teachable core; cognitive offloading is the mediating layer, which divides into lower-risk structural and higher-risk deliberative delegation and may stand in augmenting, diminishing, or displacing relations to practical wisdom; phronesis is the orienting horizon, operating through its four functions (constitutive, blueprint, regulative, and adjudicative). Governance runs inward, from wisdom to tools to skill, while offloading extends capacity outward and can erode judgment. The dashed boundaries mark the layers as permeable rather than sealed. The lower axis shows the developmental transfer of governance, which migrates from external scaffolding in the novice to internalized self-regulation in the expert.

Micro-skills are the discrete, observable practices that compose professional competence: a clinician’s structured history-taking, a teacher’s questioning and feedback routines, a writer’s techniques of drafting and revision. In Deweyan terms they are habits, embodied actions that can be deliberately practiced and flexibly adapted within cycles of inquiry. They are necessary but not sufficient. A micro-skill exercised without regard to context or consequence is mere technique; its value depends on being embedded within an orientation responsive to ethical and situational demands. Placing micro-skills at the core does not privilege technique. It marks the level at which deliberate instruction and practice

do their work, on the understanding that this work is incomplete until the outer layers are in place.

Cognitive offloading is the layer that mediates between micro-skills and phronesis. It surrounds the core, supplying scaffolds that reduce extraneous cognitive load and free attention for higher-order practice (Sweller, 1988): a citation manager relieves the writer of bibliographic bookkeeping, an analytic tool relieves the analyst of routine computation, a generative system can draft, summarize, or propose. Yet this same layer is where the deskilling risk concentrates, specifically in deliberative rather than structural offloading, because it is here that the agent decides what to delegate and what to retain. The model therefore treats offloading not as a neutral convenience but as a site of formation that must be deliberately governed. Learners must be taught not only how to use external supports, but when to rely on them, when to internalize a skill instead, and when to interrogate the output a system returns.

Phronesis encompasses both inner layers as their orienting horizon. It is not a further skill to be added alongside the others but the higher-order excellence that determines how skills and tools are used and to what end. Its work is visible in each of the four functions: perceiving what matters, holding a blueprint of the good that gives deliberation direction, regulating emotion so that judgment is neither hijacked nor anaesthetized, and adjudicating among competing considerations to reach a defensible decision. By placing phronesis at the encompassing level, the model responds directly to the worry that automation will erode the occasions for judgment. The remedy is not to refuse the tools but to subordinate them, by design and by pedagogy, to the cultivation of wisdom.

Defining the architecture this way makes its breakdowns legible, since the model is as much an account of how governance fails as of how it succeeds. Failure at the core occurs when micro-skills are never built, so that there is no competence for the outer layers to govern and offloading has nothing to extend. Failure at the middle layer occurs when offloading goes ungoverned, when the agent delegates by habit or convenience rather than by judgment, so that deliberative work which should have been retained drains outward into the tool. Failure at the outer layer occurs when phronesis is absent or dormant, so that skills and tools operate without an orienting end, producing efficient outcomes that no one has judged to be good. These are not merely theoretical possibilities. The finding that greater trust in AI tracks with reduced critical thinking (Gerlich, 2025; Lee et al., 2025) is what ungoverned offloading looks like at scale: a population delegating deliberative work while its own metacognition reports, inaccurately, that the trade has been well judged.

5.2. The Model at Work: Two Cases

Consider a graduate student writing a literature review with the help of a generative AI system. At the level of micro-skills the student is exercising

teachable competences: locating sources, summarizing an argument accurately, synthesizing claims across studies, and signposting a line of reasoning. These are the practices that instruction and feedback target directly, and they can be assessed on their own terms.

The cognitive offloading layer is engaged the moment the student delegates part of this work to the tool. Asking the system to summarize an article offloads the micro-skill of close reading; asking it to draft a paragraph offloads the micro-skill of synthesis; asking it to suggest sources offloads the search itself. Each delegation reduces load and can free attention for higher-order work. Each also removes an occasion on which the corresponding skill would otherwise have been practiced. Whether the delegation augments or erodes the student depends not on the tool but on what is delegated and why, the very judgment the model locates at this layer.

Phronesis is what governs that judgment. The constitutive function lets the student notice that a fluent AI summary has quietly misrepresented a study's findings, an academically and ethically salient cue that a hurried user would miss. The blueprint function holds the purpose of the task in view: the review exists to build the student's own understanding and to represent the literature honestly, not merely to generate text. The regulative function manages the pull of convenience and the pressure of a deadline, the affective forces that make uncritical offloading tempting and that, as the evidence suggests, intensify with trust in the tool (Lee et al., 2025). The adjudicative function weighs these together and decides, in this case, to use the tool to check coverage but to write the synthesis unaided, because doing so is what both integrity and learning require. The same student, facing a routine formatting task rather than an interpretive one, might wisely offload far more. The model does not prescribe a fixed answer; it specifies the layered considerations through which a defensible answer is reached.

To see that the model discriminates between cases rather than issuing a blanket verdict, consider a contrasting one. A secondary teacher uses a generative AI system to help comment on a set of student essays. The layers reappear, but the stakes shift, because the teacher is not a learner building a skill but a professional whose judgment bears on the development of others. At the micro-skill level the teacher exercises diagnostic reading, formative feedback, and the calibration of tone to a particular student. The offloading layer is engaged when the teacher asks the system to flag surface errors, draft routine comments, or summarize patterns across the set, much of which is structural offloading the model has no quarrel with, since delegating the detection of comma splices frees attention for what matters more. The hazard appears the moment the delegation turns deliberative: when the teacher lets the system decide whether a struggling student's argument succeeds, or adopts its generic encouragement in place of a judgment about what this student, at this point, most needs to hear. Here the constitutive function

registers the small but telling sign of a student beginning to take an intellectual risk, which a fluent generic comment would miss; the blueprint function holds in view that the purpose of feedback is the student's growth rather than the efficient closure of a grading queue; and the adjudicative function accepts the machine's surface corrections while reserving the substantive, relational feedback for the teacher's own hand. The same architecture that licensed generous offloading for the graduate student's formatting now counsels restraint, because the delegated judgment is one on which another person's development depends. That is what it means for the model to be context-sensitive rather than rule-bound. It does not sort tools into good and bad but asks, case by case, whether a particular delegation preserves or pre-empts the judgment the situation requires.

5.3. Development, Scaffolding, and What the Model Adds

It is fair to ask what this framework offers beyond its three sources taken separately. Virtue ethics already holds that judgment develops through practice; distributed cognition already holds that thinking extends into tools; pragmatism already holds that habits are refined through inquiry. The distinctive move of the model is to treat cognitive offloading not as a neutral convenience that sits outside this picture but as a formative layer within it, a site at which the practice that builds phronesis is either preserved or quietly removed. Seen this way, the decision of what to offload is not a logistical matter but a pedagogical and ethical one, because it determines which capacities a learner will go on exercising. That reframing is what the three traditions, held apart, do not supply.

The scope of the model should be stated plainly. It is most useful where tasks combine teachable technique, available tools, and genuine judgment, which is to say in professional and higher education rather than in the earliest stages of skill acquisition. It also carries a developmental caution. The configuration of the layers is not fixed across levels of expertise. For an expert, offloading a routine sub-task frees capacity for judgment; for a novice who has not yet built the underlying skill, the same act may prevent that skill from forming at all. What counts as healthy offloading at one stage can amount to deskilling at another, so educators and researchers must calibrate offloading to the learner's developmental position rather than treat it as uniformly beneficial or uniformly suspect.

This raises an apparent paradox. If phronesis governs offloading, but novices have not yet developed phronesis, who governs the novice's offloading? The answer is that the outermost layer is, at first, external. For the beginner the governing function is supplied not by the learner's own practical wisdom but by the instructor, the curriculum, and the design of the task, what may be called scaffolded or institutional phronesis. A teacher who specifies which parts of an assignment may be delegated to an AI system and which must be attempted unaided is, in effect, exercising the adjudicative function on the novice's behalf.

As the learner internalizes micro-skills and begins to perceive for themselves what a situation requires, this external scaffolding is gradually withdrawn, in the manner long described in accounts of guided participation and the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978; Wood et al., 1976). The governing ring does not disappear; it migrates from the environment into the learner, a transition that parallels the development of self-regulated learning, in which the monitoring and adjustment of one's own work shifts over time from external sources to the learner (Zimmerman, 2002). The model is therefore not a static picture of three fixed layers but a developmental one, in which responsibility for governing offloading transfers over time from the instructional architecture to the maturing judgment of the student. This keeps in view a distinction the model depends on, between the learner's internal self-regulation and the external instructional architecture that stands in for it until that self-regulation is formed.

There is a further reason the beginner cannot yet govern alone. Yacek and Jonas (2025) argue that *phronesis* presupposes a prerequisite its advocates often overlook: a prior and extended habituation in the ethical virtues, or *ethismos*. A novice who has not undergone this habituation lacks not only the micro-skills to be governed but the settled ethical dispositions on which mature judgment depends, which is why Yacek and Jonas propose that teacher education make room for the formative moments of insight that can set ethical habituation in motion. External scaffolding must therefore do double duty, supporting the formation of skill and the slower work of ethical habituation alike. This is why the governing ring is withdrawn gradually rather than handed over at a stroke: practical wisdom cannot be installed, only grown.

5.4. Principles for Governing Offloading

Because the model treats offloading as a site of formation rather than a neutral convenience, it yields a set of working principles for designing and governing it. The first is to protect the formative core: a skill that has not yet been built should not be offloaded, since delegating it forecloses its formation, and the earlier the stage of learning, the more of the deliberative work must be reserved for the learner. The second is to govern by kind, distinguishing structural from deliberative offloading and treating them differently. Structural offloading can be granted liberally, because relieving extraneous load frees capacity for the work that builds competence (Sweller, 1988), whereas deliberative offloading should be granted sparingly and deliberately, because it removes the occasions on which judgment is exercised. The third is to build in friction for deliberative tasks, designing them so that delegating a judgment requires a visible, intentional choice rather than an effortless default, since the convenience of the tool will otherwise do the deciding.

The fourth principle is to make delegation visible and reflective. Requiring learners to declare what they offloaded and why turns an invisible habit into an

object of metacognitive attention, which is the precondition for governing it well. The fifth is to fade scaffolding on purpose. As competence grows, the external governance supplied by instructor and task design should be progressively withdrawn so that the learner assumes it, in keeping with the development of self-regulated learning, in which control over one's own performance transfers gradually from external supports to the learner (Zimmerman, 2002). The sixth is to preserve occasions for judgment across the curriculum as a whole, ensuring that some tasks remain in which deliberative work cannot be delegated, so that phronesis continues to have the occasions through which it is developed and maintained. Taken together, these principles convert the layered diagram into a design stance: not a rule that forbids offloading, but a discipline that subordinates it, at every stage, to the cultivation of judgment.

5.5. Situating the Model Among Existing Frameworks

The Phronetic–Distributed Learning Model does not enter an empty field. Educational technology already has several influential frameworks for thinking about how tools and learning meet, and locating the model in relation to them clarifies both what it shares with them and what it adds. The short statement of its contribution is this. The established frameworks describe the knowledge teachers need, the degree to which a tool transforms a task, the conditions of deep online inquiry, and the cycle of self-regulation. None of them makes its central question which cognitive work may be delegated to a machine without eroding the judgment that education exists to form. That question is the one the present model is built to answer, and it can be layered onto each of the others rather than competing with them.

Consider first the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework, which holds that effective technology integration requires teachers to command the interplay of content, pedagogy, and technology rather than any one of these alone (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). This is an indispensable account of the knowledge a teacher must possess, but it is descriptive rather than normative about delegation. It specifies what a teacher needs to know in order to use a tool well; it does not, in itself, say which uses preserve the learner's developing judgment and which quietly replace it. The Phronetic–Distributed Learning Model supplies that missing axis. Where the knowledge framework asks whether a tool is integrated knowledgeably, the present model asks whether a given integration governs offloading or surrenders to it, adding an explicitly ethical and developmental criterion to an account that is otherwise about competence.

The Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition model is, by contrast, evaluative, ranking technology uses by how far they transform a task, from mere substitution of an old tool by a new one to the redefinition of tasks that were previously inconceivable. Yet its critics have noted that the model abstracts away from context, privileges the transformed product over the learning process,

and treats higher levels of transformation as self-evidently better (Hamilton et al., 2016). From the standpoint of the present model this is precisely the limitation that matters, because a task can be redefined in ways that displace human judgment as readily as in ways that extend it. Redefinition is not intrinsically good; a tool that redefines essay writing by performing the synthesis on the student's behalf scores highly on transformation while scoring poorly on the preservation of judgment. The Phronetic–Distributed Learning Model supplies the evaluative criterion that a transformation taxonomy lacks: not how much a tool changes a task, but whether the change preserves or pre-emptly the deliberative work the task was meant to develop.

The Community of Inquiry framework, developed to explain deep learning in text-based and online environments, identifies three interacting presences: cognitive presence, the cycle of inquiry through which understanding is constructed; social presence, the projection of learners as real persons in a community; and teaching presence, the design and facilitation that hold the experience together (Garrison et al., 2000). The resonances with the present model are close and mutually illuminating. Teaching presence is, in the vocabulary used here, external scaffolding, the governance that the instructor and the task design supply before the learner can supply it. Cognitive presence is the deliberative work that the inquiry cycle requires, and it is exactly this work that deliberative offloading threatens to short-circuit, since a system that moves directly to a resolution can bypass the exploration and integration through which understanding would have formed. The Phronetic–Distributed Learning Model can therefore be read as specifying what must not be offloaded if cognitive presence is to remain intact, and as adding to teaching presence the developmental claim that it is meant to fade as the learner's own judgment matures.

Finally, the model stands in a close and deliberate relation to self-regulated learning, the cyclical process through which learners set goals, monitor their performance, and adjust their strategies, and through which novices who initially depend on external feedback become learners who regulate themselves (Zimmerman, 2002). The transfer of the governing function from instructional architecture to the maturing student, described earlier, is a phronetic specialization of exactly this development. What the present model adds is twofold. It makes the governance of cognitive offloading a distinct object of self-regulation, so that deciding what to delegate and what to retain becomes part of the regulatory cycle rather than a precondition of it, and it places that self-regulation under an ethical horizon, so that the end being regulated toward is not merely successful task completion but the kind of judgment a flourishing professional life requires. Across all four comparisons the pattern is the same. The Phronetic–Distributed Learning Model is not a rival to these frameworks but a complement that supplies what each, on its own terms, leaves unaddressed: a

principled way to decide which cognitive work may be handed to a machine, and which must remain the learner's own.

6. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

6.1. Implications for Pedagogy and Professional Practice

The model has concrete implications for educational design. Because it positions *phronesis* as the orienting frame, cognitive offloading as the mediating process, and micro-skills as the foundation, it directs attention to all three levels at once. At the level of judgment, educators should create structured opportunities for learners to exercise discernment in authentic contexts. Case-based learning, simulations, and problem-based inquiry can require learners to balance technical correctness against ethical, contextual, and relational considerations, while reflective journals, peer dialogue, and guided debriefings make the reasoning behind decisions explicit, which is essential if the regulative and adjudicative functions are to be developed rather than assumed. At the level of skill, micro-skills should be taught not as isolated techniques but as *habits-in-context*: communication skills in teacher education or clinical training, for example, are best practiced within scenarios that foreground the learner's responsibility toward others, with instruction continually connecting each skill to the broader ends of flourishing that give it point.

At the level of offloading, educators must help learners distinguish delegation that supports judgment from delegation that supplants it. A productive exercise is to have learners compare their own analysis with an AI-generated output, evaluating not only accuracy but ethical and contextual appropriateness, which cultivates the stance of *epistemic heed* in which the learner consults the machine without ceding control to it (Tsai & Ku, 2025). Because educational and professional settings frequently prize efficiency, the framework insists that efficiency be balanced against ethical deliberation. Educators can model this balance by showing how tools accelerate routine, structural tasks while deliberately slowing down for decisions that carry ethical or human consequences. Learning when not to offload is as important as learning how to offload well, and given evidence that trust in AI can quietly displace critical effort (Gerlich, 2025; Lee et al., 2025), this discernment is itself a teachable objective rather than an afterthought.

Education and leadership are paradigmatic burdened professions, in which practitioners routinely confront unpredictable and ethically charged situations that technical competence alone cannot resolve (Kristjánsson, 2024; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). Here *phronesis* supplies the discernment to balance competing values, regulate emotional responses, and orient decisions toward flourishing (Yacek & Jonas, 2025; Girado-Sierra et al., 2024). The pedagogies suited to these professions map onto the three layers of the model: micro-skills are honed through practice and feedback, offloading is integrated responsibly, and

phronesis is cultivated through case study, guided ethical discussion that surfaces conflicts among virtues, and the mentorship and apprenticeship through which embodied judgment is transmitted from the experienced to the novice.

6.2. A Research Agenda

The model opens several lines of empirical inquiry. The four-componential account suggests ways of operationalizing phronesis in observable terms, building on existing efforts to measure its functions (Darnell et al., 2019; Kristjánsson et al., 2021). The structural and deliberative distinction invites comparative studies of how different forms of offloading shape ethical reasoning, distinguishing augmenting from diminishing and displacing relations (Zelny, 2025), and refining the correlational findings now emerging on AI use and critical thinking into causal designs (Gerlich, 2025; Lee et al., 2025). Longitudinal and mixed-methods studies could track how practical wisdom develops, or fails to develop, across sustained engagement with AI, and whether the predicted transfer of the governing function from external scaffolding to internalized judgment can be observed and supported. Learners' own perceptions of artificial phronesis, and their willingness to defer to or heed machine outputs, are a further promising target.

6.3. Limitations and Conclusion

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The Phronetic–Distributed Learning Model is conceptual rather than empirical, and its layered architecture is a heuristic rather than a validated measurement structure. Its boundaries are porous: a single act may exercise a micro-skill, involve offloading, and call for judgment at once, which is why the layers are best understood as permeable regions rather than sealed compartments. The model takes a considered position on the status of action, treating the adjudicative function as issuing in the reasoned choice that sets a skill in motion, though the deeper question of whether action is internal to phronesis or its downstream expression remains contested. The developmental transfer of the governing function from external scaffolding to internalized judgment is offered as a conceptual proposal that future empirical work would need to test, including how far the four functions can be measured independently.

For practitioners the model reframes a familiar pressure. The question is not simply how to use a tool well but whether a given use of it helps the learner think better or quietly thinks in the learner's place. Reflection, dialogue, and critical AI literacy are, on this account, not supplements to technical training but conditions of its value. In a world of instant answers and algorithmic guidance, the deeper task of education remains what it has long been: to form persons who can perceive what matters, choose well among difficult alternatives, and act with integrity. That is the enduring promise of phronesis, and the continuing responsibility of the educators, leaders, and researchers who work in its name.

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