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Boosts GDP via
Well-Being

Cultural
Industries and
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Territorial
Amazonian
Psychology
Foundations

Maximizing L2
Responses to
Avatar Chatbots

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Contributors should preserve citations, transliterations, translations, dates, and archival references with care so that arguments remain legible across disciplines and over time.

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Article Record

Economic Valuation of Sports Well-Being: Quantifying the Impact of Rugby Match Watching on Work Productivity and GDP in Japan

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ABSTRACT

Background: In recent years, understanding the macroeconomic contributions and social value of sports has advanced globally. While traditional sports management literature heavily focuses on subjective well-being and social capital, few empirical studies have quantified the mechanisms translating these intangible psychological benefits into macro-level economic indicators, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Purpose: This study focused on rugby to quantify the socioeconomic value of sports-induced well-being. Specifically, it elucidated the causal pathways through which rugby match watching enhances labor productivity and simulated its ultimate contribution to national GDP and Social Return on Investment (SROI).

Methods: A web-based survey was conducted from June 11 to 23, 2026, targeting a sample of 14,835 rugby fans in Japan. The survey captured demographics, viewing behaviors, and self-reported improvements in psychological, interpersonal, and physical dimensions. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics, co-occurrence network structure analysis of open-ended happiness descriptions, and path analysis to test the direct and indirect effects of well-being factors on work productivity.

Results: Descriptive statistics revealed high engagement among respondents, with rugby watching yielding substantial perceived benefits for stress relief, social bonds, and social well-being. The co-occurrence network analysis visualized that the peak moments of happiness are deeply tied to...

Index Terms: co-occurrence network • economic valuation • GDP • path analysis • rugby • social return on investment • sports well-being • work productivity

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Discussion/Conclusion: The self-reported work productivity increase (28.36%) was converted into a conservative macroeconomic model (10% realization rate) to prevent overestimation bias. Assuming an affected labor population of 200,000 workers, regular rugby watching is estimated to create an annual economic value of 30.5 billion JPY (165 million EUR) through improved real productivity. Operationally utilizing the Japan Rugby Football Union’s 2025 budget (8.3 billion JPY) as the investment baseline, the estimated SROI ratio was 3.67. This study underscores that public and corporate investments in sports environments are highly efficient economic policies that mitigate workplace presenteeism, improve worker well-being, and tangibly support national macroeconomic growth.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Economic Valuation of Sports Well-Being: Quantifying the Impact of Rugby Match Watching on Work Productivity and GDP in Japan

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Background: In recent years, understanding the macroeconomic contributions and social value of sports has advanced globally. While traditional sports management literature heavily focuses on subjective well-being and social capital, few empirical studies have quantified the mechanisms translating these intangible psychological benefits into macro-level economic indicators, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

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Keywords: co-occurrence network, economic valuation, GDP, path analysis, rugby, social return on investment, sports well-being, work productivity

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1 Introduction

In recent years (2024–2026), statistical verification using macroeconomic data and empirical case studies have rapidly advanced worldwide regarding how much sports contribute to national assets. Kostadinović et al (2025) collaborated with EUROSTAT to comprehensively

track sports-related goods and services across Europe. The sports sector (game watching, performance, and related industries) contributes about 3.37% of the EU GDP (over 100 trillion JPY: approximately 627.5 billion EUR). This study formulates a mechanism by which regular sports experiences improve workers’ mental health (reducing loneliness

and depression) and that eliminating “workplace unemployment” (a state where productivity drops while attending work: presenteeism) directly contributes to maintaining and raising macro-GDP across all industries.

In a study on urban economic resilience through attracting large-scale sporting events, Li (2026) views sports events not as “transient tourism consumption” but as “investments that enhance the long-term economic resilience of cities and businesses.” This study examines panel data from major cities. Cities that regularly host professional sports and large-scale sporting events have demonstrated significantly higher “economic resilience” in the event of external economic shocks (such as recessions) compared to cities that do not host the event. Furthermore, by regularly engaging with sports, it has demonstrated that the subjective well-being of citizens (workers) increases, optimizing industrial collaboration within local communities and labor utilization rates—an “intangible legacy effect” that strongly supports GDP.

The World Economic Forum (Davos Conference) report on “Sports Economics” (2026) analyzes growth forecasts for the global sports economy and how sports are driving productivity in other industries. As of 2026, the global sports industry will generate 372 trillion JPY annually, equivalent to 2.02 trillion EUR; it is said that its true value lies in the ‘Green Spillover Effects’ it provides to other sectors such as healthcare, tourism, and technology. In particular, the combination of the “digital economy × sports watching” has established consumption scenarios that boost fan motivation and well-being, even outside stadiums (at home or at work). It is pointed out that this stimulates engagement among businesspeople and indirectly streamlines the efficiency of corporate production activities.

WHO(2022) clarified the disease burden and economic losses caused by insufficient physical activity and economic growth in each country, and proposed policies to promote physical activity by 2030. As a representative study directly estimating the economic effects of healthcare, Ding et al. (2016) presented the economic losses due to global physical inactivity, as well as losses in medical expenses and productivity. The WEF’s Future of Jobs Report (2023:2025) is an official report that explores discussions on “healthy workers,” “well-being,” and “human capital investment.” References to ESG, social value, and corporate value as Stakeholder Capitalism are considered highly compatible with social value and SROI research in sports (WEF. 2020). A particularly effective study in sports research is the OECD’s international comparison of happiness, which is a representative literature discussing subjective well-being, productivity improvement, and economic growth (2019; 2020). Policy discussions that deepen the human capital value of well-being created through sports and health promotion are needed (Sasaki et al. 2025).

1.1 Purpose/Method

In this study, we focused on rugby to quantify the socioeconomic value of wellbeing, conducting a web survey via email to rugby fans. Reply information was anonymous, and no personal information was collected. It takes about five minutes to respond to the web, so the psychological stress is extremely low. This research was approved by the NSPC (Nippon Sport Policy Commission) Research Ethics Committee (May 2026: Approval No. 26-1). The survey period was June 10~21, 2026.

The questions included age, gender, method of watching, frequency of watching, and the benefits of rugby watching for wellbeing. Participants choose from options ranging from 0%, 5%, 10%, 20%, 30%, or 50% or higher for ‘stress relief,’ ‘increased work productivity,’ ‘building bonds with family and friends,’ ‘physical health,’ ‘social well-being,’ and ‘favorability toward supported companies.’ Finally, it was an openended question about the moment when watching the game feels the happiest. The analysis included descriptive statistics, a co-occurrence network

structure of the value that makes watchers feel most happy (free-form description) (Sasaki et al., 2025), and the well-being factors were the contribution value to work productivity (path analysis) and GDP contribution value (we used R program). The uniqueness of this study lies in proposing a structured approach to well-being GDP contribution by quantifying sports value.

1.2 Results and discussion

The web survey was sent and collected from June 11th to 23rd 2026 : total Sample Size: 14,835 respondents.

2 Descriptive statistics related to well-being

Data mainly targeted “men aged 50 and over” and “enthusiastic rugby fans who regularly watch matches (several times a month~). Overall, engagement with rugby was extremely high, with particularly positive evaluations for stress relief, strengthening bonds, and social well-being.

Rugby watchers tended to feel more psychological and interpersonal benefits than physical ones. The highest proportion of respondents answered “over 50%” across all categories (with a frequency of 50.0 for all categories), and overall, very positive responses about rugby watching were gathered.

Most of the types of watching were live at stadiums (88.4%) and TV (73.8%). Aside from rugby, most of the games are ‘baseball’ (63.3%) and football (42%), showing the popular sports in Japan.

The effects of watching games are, in the order of “stress relief,” “building bonds with family and colleagues,” “increased social well-being,” “favorability of supporting companies,” “labor productivity,” and then “physical health.” The social and interpersonal value of watching is also relatively high.

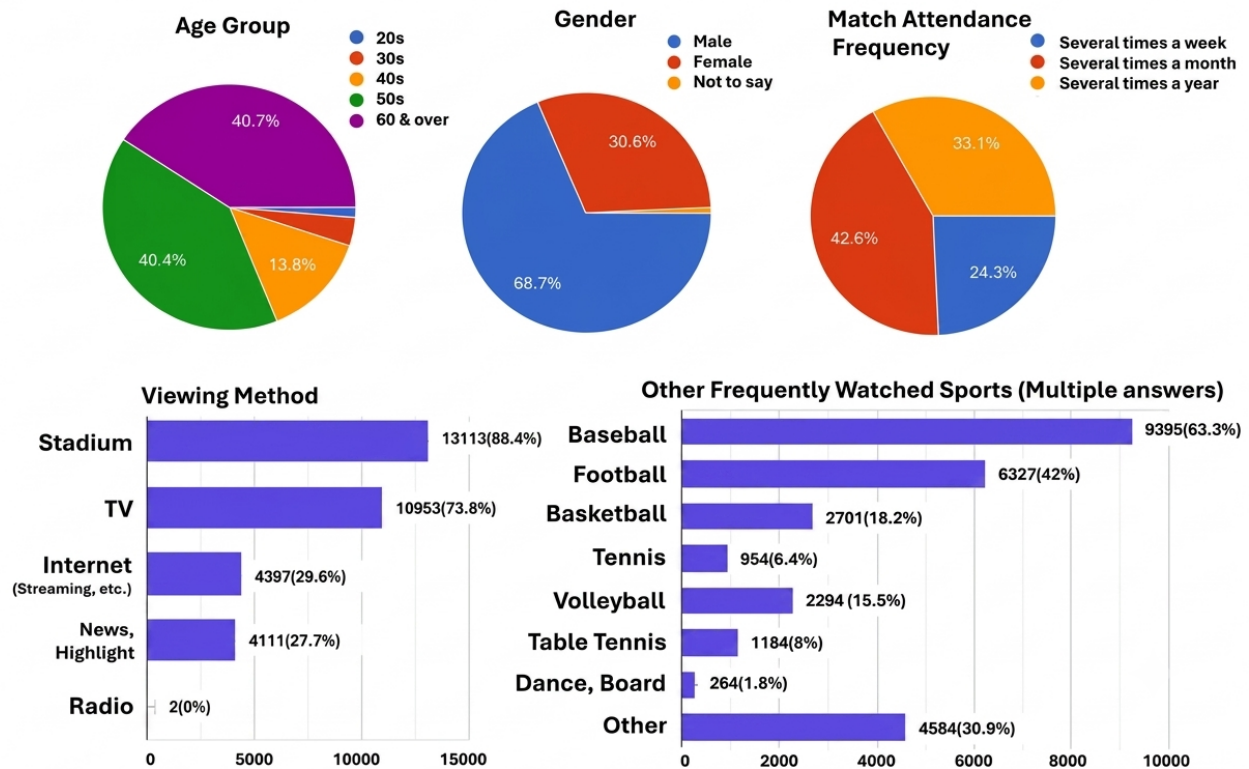


Figure 1. Profiles of the Survey Subjects

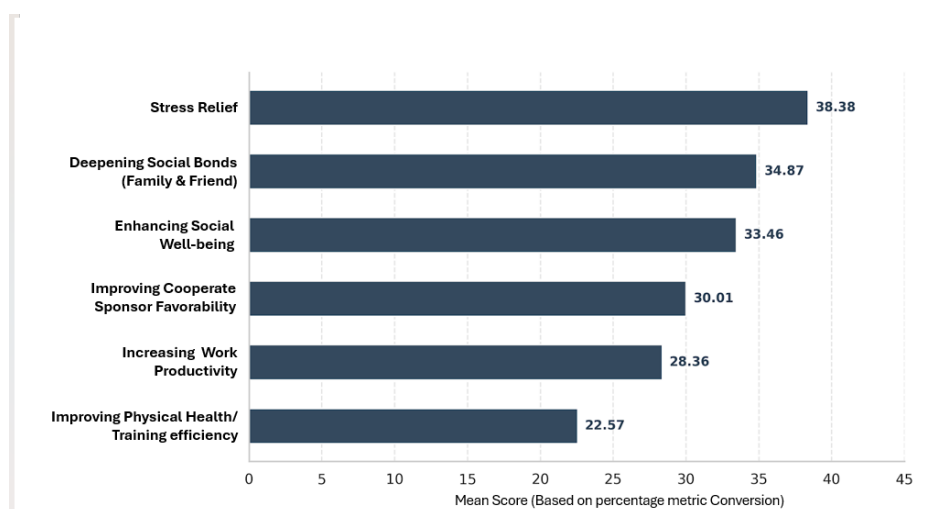


Figure 2. Perceived Value Impact of Rugby Match watching in 2025-2026 JPN (n=14,826)



Figure 3. Distribution of Values by Rugby Match watching in 2025-2026 JPN (by average score)

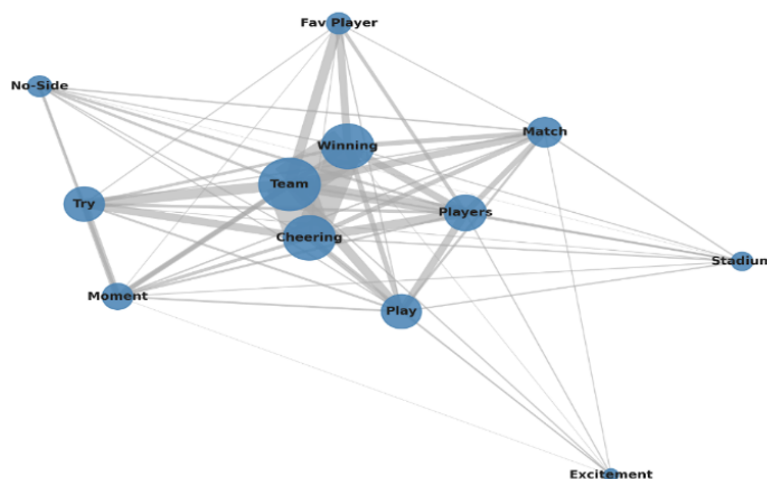


Figure 4. Co-occurrence Network: Happiest Moment in Rugby Match Watching (n=14,835)

3 Co-occurrence Network Structure of rugby Watching Value

A co-occurrence network graph was drawn from the response results on ‘The happiest moment you feel most from watching games.’ The size of the circle in the graph indicated the frequency of occurrence, and the thickness of the line indicated the strength (or abundance) of the co-occurrence.

(1) Central Cluster: Team / Winning / Cheering

At the very center of the network, connected by the strongest line. It was visually proven that the “moment when the team you support wins” is a universal and greatest source of happiness for spectators.

(2) Rugby-specific competition and aesthetic cluster (left to center): Try / Players / Play

Moment Features: This was a group of happiness strongly linked to dynamic competitive characteristics, such as “offense and defense just before a try” or “the moment witnessing a player’s excellent play.”

No-Side Features: The games were widely connected like a web, connecting ‘matches,’ ‘players,’ and ‘try.’ This showed that many people felt the deep emotion and happiness unique to rugby in moments of hugs and handshakes (the no-side spirit) when they celebrate their efforts without friend or foe after fierce battles.

(3) Personal attachment and stadium experience cluster (top, right side)

Fav Player (favorite) Features: Connected by thick lines with “teams” and “players,” the very act of “having your favorite players or teams perform” is an independent and strong element of happiness.

Stadium / Excitement Features: Located around the network (bottom right), connected to “matches” and “play.” Not only TV and streaming, but also moments of “emotion” surrounded by the live atmosphere and unity of the local stadium are highlighted as unique experiential values.

From the results of free writing, it is not just about “I’m happy to win,” but also about “cheering for players who play with dedication (Cheering → Players), witnessing their wonderful plays and try moments (Play → Try → Moment), and praising each other with no side after the match (Match → No-Side).” This cooccurrence network clearly reveals that rugby watchers could find the greatest happiness (wellbeing) in the entire series of rugby stories.

4 Rugby Watching and Work Productivity

While most previous sports management research has focused on the impact on ‘social well-being,’ this study aims to examine the mechanisms of contribution to the macroeconomy beyond that. Therefore, we set ‘work efficiency’ as the target variable approach through path analysis.

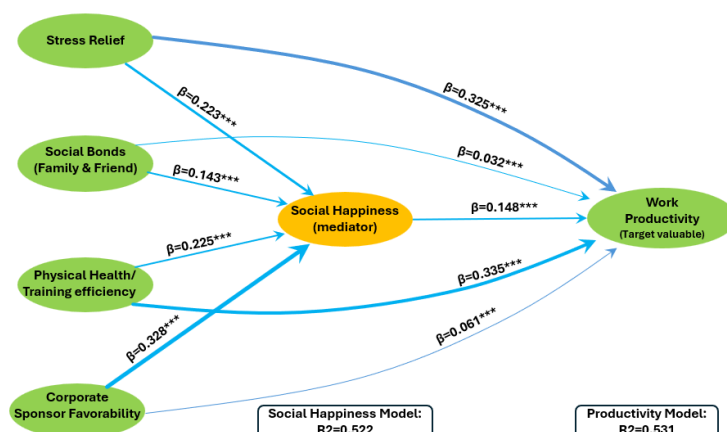


Figure 5. Path Analysis Model for Personal, Social, and Labor Productivity Values of Rugby Watchers (Standardized Path Coefficients: β)

Using Path Analysis, we elucidated the specific causal mechanism of whether watching sports increases labor productivity. In path analysis, placing “mediating variables” between factors allows verification of direct and indirect effects (causal steps).

Firstly, as a theoretical path model, it is proposed that personal value (primary effect), ‘stress relief,’ ‘physical health,’ ‘bonds with family and friends,’ and ‘favorability toward supporting companies’ from watching rugby directly enhance labor productivity. Next, transition path to social and macro values (mediating variables), personal fulfillment fosters a broader perception of “social happiness” (macro positive emotions). Achieving the final target variable brings together personal fulfillment (direct effect) and empathy for social well-being (indirect effect), resulting in ‘improved productivity in work and study.’ The path analysis results (standardized path coefficient: β) represent the strength of each causal pathway calculated based on statistical analysis (all pathways are extremely significant at $p < 0.001$).

First Step is the path from personal value to social well-being: a chain of factors that trigger the macro psychology of “enhancing the overall well-being of society.” By fostering a positive impression of companies supporting sports and fulfilling one’s own physical and mental health, we can understand a process where psychology shifts toward a macro perspective that “this sports culture would be making society as a whole happy.”

Next step serves as a path from each variable to work productivity, including the direct effects (the power to directly improve work productivity) and the indirect effects (the power to mediate ‘social wellbeing’ to improve work productivity: for example, the favorability of a supporting company improve social happiness and affect work productivity: i.e., $0.328 \times 0.148 = 0.049$, etc..

From pass analysis, we can understand the dual structure: ‘direct performance improvements’ and ‘benefits from macro environments.’ While proving that individual “physical health (0.335)” and “stress relief (0.325)” exist as powerful direct channels (direct effects) to improve work productivity, at the same time, a mental backup route (indirect effect) that mediates a macro environmental perception (0.148) that “overall social well-being is rising” also functions simultaneously. It could logically demonstrate the comprehensive value transmission mechanism of rugby watching.

Descriptive statistics showed that ‘favorability of supporting companies’ had little impact on work productivity. However, by analyzing the path, ‘goodwill toward corporate support (0.328)’ became the biggest trigger for fostering ‘overall social well-being.’ This mediates

social well-being (0.148) and indirectly contributes significantly to work productivity (indirect effect: 0.049). The significance of social values like as CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and ESG (Environmental Social Governance) of sponsorship, which states that “corporate support for sports ultimately contributes to improving work productivity across society,” could be confirmed.

5 Work Productivity, GDP, and SROI (Social Return of Investment)

In this study, watching rugby increased work productivity (28.36%), but considering self-reported productivity as equivalent to macroeconomic GDP growth rates would lead to overestimation bias (Barrero et al., 2021). To ensure the robustness of policy implications and align with standard macroeconomic evaluation frameworks (Kahn et al., 2021), the realization scenarios for productivity improvement psychology can be considered as follows: conservative type (10% realization rate, GDP-equivalent effect 2.83%), standard type (25% realization rate, 7.09%), and optimistic type (50% realization rate, 14.18%). Based on previous research (Kostadinović, 2025; Kekkonen, 2025; Gibbs, 2023), subjective improvements in work productivity could be converted to about a 2.0% to 3.5% increase in real labor productivity (recovery of workplace unemployment), and setting a figure of 2.84% as a contribution to GDP base improvement would be considered reasonable.

The following is the estimation process. Japan’s GDP reached 669 trillion JPY (approximately 3,63 trillion EUR: Calculated at the exchange rate of 1 EUR = 184 JPY as of June 2026). The GDP per capita is 5.45 million JPY (30,000 EUR). The population of improving productivity is set at 200,000 workers (half of the 400,000 fan registrations). This value would be highly consistent with the 200,000 adults who watch multiple games (5–6 times) for JPN Rugby League One 2024–2025 season, 1,187,470 = 1.2 million total attendances. The work productivity rate reported above was 28.3%, but the actual economic value of productivity gains is set more conservatively at the 10% of 28 (=2.83%). If per capita GDP of 5.45 million JPY increases by 2.8%, the estimated value creation is 150,000 JPY (813EUR). The total economic value created (converted to GDP) is 30.5 billion JPY (165 million EUR), equivalent to the productivity improvement effect of 200,000 rugby watchers. This estimate was set conservatively (as low as possible) based on past research. However, improving the watching environment for sports such as rugby might be a “highly efficient economic policy” directly linked

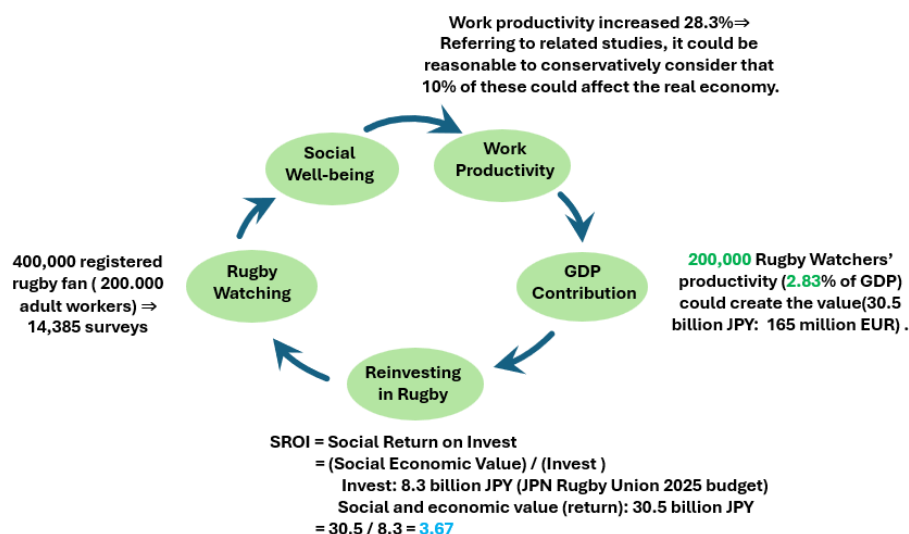


Figure 6. Sports Wellbeing (Work Productivity) GDP Contribution cycle Model

to improving worker productivity, corporate performance, and even the national budget.

In recent years, the Social Return of Investment Index (SROI) expresses how many times the social and economic value would be returned to the invested costs, expressed as a ratio (multiple). Here, the investment amount is operationally set as the Japan Rugby Football Union 2025 budget (8.3 billion JPY: 48.8 million EUR), and its SROI is estimated.

5.1 SROI = (30.5 billion JPY; 165 million EUR) / (8.3 billion JPY; 48.8 million EUR) = 3.67

The SROI analysis yielded a ratio of 3.67:1. This indicates that for every 1 JPY invested by the national governing body (JRFU), approximately 3.67 JPY of social and economic value could be returned to Japanese society through enhanced work productivity. The calculated SROI ratio (3.67) might demonstrate the substantial socioeconomic justification for public and corporate investments in rugby. While sports budgets are often scrutinized for their direct financial returns, this finding highlights that the true value of rugby watchers extends to macro-level economic benefits, specifically by mitigating workplace stress and boosting national productivity (GDP). It should be noted again that this SROI ratio is a conservative estimate, as it solely accounts for worker productivity and excludes other potential social returns, such as reductions in healthcare costs or community revitalization.

6 Future tasks and limitations of this study

As a result, sports sponsorship value would be expected to continue questioning the validity of estimation methods as the development focuses on community attachment and trust-building. There are clarifying the multilayered sports values such as national economic value (rugby watching → well-being → labor productivity → GDP contribution), regional social values (rugby watching → social bonds → social capital → regional revitalization), or corporate value (rugby watching → favorability of supporting companies → enhancement of corporate value) without overestimating.

Although the data size of this study could suggest some kind of validity in these estimates, future research approaches would

require even more careful consideration of the actual socioeconomic engagement structures. For example, we must be vigilant that value could be lost due to dark events such as matchfixing, doping, and violence, which are serious social issues behind sports. In any case, the economic approach must not deviate from what is meant to contribute to the true well-being of people and society.

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Cultural Industries: Foundations and Development Challenges in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

In the context of globalization, cultural industries have increasingly become strategic assets in diplomacy, international cooperation, and the strengthening of national identity and competitiveness. In Vietnam, the development of cultural industries is now considered an urgent and essential requirement for sustainable socio-economic growth. Under the Strategy for the Development of Vietnam's Cultural Industries to 2020, with a Vision to 2030, the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam established specific targets for cultural industries to contribute approximately 3% of national GDP while simultaneously generating additional employment opportunities for society. Although these objectives were initially formulated as strategic orientations, they demonstrate that cultural industries are receiving growing governmental and social attention and possess significant developmental potential in Vietnam. Nevertheless, the sector also faces numerous structural limitations and developmental challenges in the process of integration into the global cultural economy. This study employs a qualitative research approach based on document analysis, policy analysis, and interdisciplinary review methods. Data were collected from governmental policy documents, UNESCO reports, World Bank statistics, and previous academic studies related to...

Index Terms: Challenges • cultural and creative industries • cultural industries • opportunities • potential • Vietnam

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cultural Industries: Foundations and Development Challenges in Vietnam

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Abstract

In the context of globalization, cultural industries have increasingly become strategic assets in diplomacy, international cooperation, and the strengthening of national identity and competitiveness. In Vietnam, the development of cultural industries is now considered an urgent and essential requirement for sustainable socio-economic growth. Under the Strategy for the Development of Vietnam's Cultural Industries to 2020, with a Vision to 2030, the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam established specific targets for cultural industries to contribute approximately 3% of national GDP while simultaneously generating additional employment opportunities for society. Although these objectives were initially formulated as strategic orientations, they demonstrate that cultural industries are receiving growing governmental and social attention and possess significant developmental potential in Vietnam. Nevertheless, the sector also faces numerous structural limitations and developmental challenges in the process of integration into the global cultural economy. This study employs a qualitative research approach based on document analysis, policy analysis, and interdisciplinary review methods. Data were collected from governmental policy documents, UNESCO reports, World Bank statistics, and previous academic studies related to cultural and creative industries in Vietnam and internationally. Through comparative and interpretive analysis, the article evaluates the foundations, opportunities, and challenges associated with the development of cultural industries in Vietnam within the contemporary globalization era.

Keywords: *Challenges, cultural and creative industries, cultural industries, opportunities, potential, Vietnam*

Correspondence: Nguyen Van Tien

1 Introduction

Cultural industries are an emerging industrial sector encompassing the production, distribution, and commercialization of cultural goods and services associated with creativity, symbolic value, and market-oriented activities. In contemporary scholarship, cultural industries are commonly understood as sectors that transform cultural expressions, artistic creativity, and intellectual resources into economic products and services through industrial and technological processes (Adorno & Bernstein, 2001; Huet, 1978). Due to their close relationship with the broader creative economy, they are also frequently referred to as cultural and creative industries (CCIs), emphasizing the growing importance of creativity, innovation, intellectual property, and digital technology in modern economic development (Perit-Ortiz et al., 2019; Pham & Dang, 2014). The operation of this sector is fundamentally associated with creative ideas, technological innovation, and the application of science and digital communication technologies, which increasingly shape the production, circulation, and consumption of cultural products in the contemporary global economy (Bustamante, 2004; CISAC, 2017).

According to UNESCO's first global mapping of cultural and creative industries, released in 2017 based on 2015 data (British Council, 2016), Cultural and Creative Industries generated approximately USD 2.25 trillion in global revenue and provided employment for nearly 29.5 million people worldwide. More importantly, CCIs are considered a "young industry" in both literal and symbolic terms, as nearly 20% of

the workforce involved in this sector consists of individuals between the ages of 15 and 29 — a proportion higher than that found in many other professional sectors. Beyond their economic significance, CCIs are increasingly viewed as important drivers of innovation, urban development, social transformation, and national competitiveness, particularly in rapidly developing Asian economies (Florida, 2002; Perit-Ortiz et al., 2019).

UNESCO statistics further indicate that Asia, home to leading cultural and creative economies such as Japan, South Korea, China, and India, has become the world's largest CCI market, surpassing both Europe and North America. The remarkable growth of Asian cultural industries demonstrates how culture can become an important source of economic growth, cultural branding, and international influence when supported by effective policies, technological innovation, and long-term strategic investment (Pham, 2015). Furthermore, according to World Bank data published in 2019, cultural industries — including cultural tourism — contributed approximately 4.04% of total global revenue and accounted for 2.21% of global employment, while workers in the sector earned incomes approximately 2.44 times higher than the global average (World Bank, 2019). These figures demonstrate that cultural industries are capable of generating substantial revenue, creating significant employment opportunities, and functioning as strategic industries in many countries around the world.

In the current era of accelerating globalization and digital transformation, countries with underdeveloped cultural industries are in-

creasingly likely to become dependent on imported cultural products, foreign media systems, and external cultural consumption patterns. This situation not only weakens their competitive advantages in domestic markets but also limits their capacity to develop export-oriented cultural products capable of participating in international cultural markets. At the same time, globalization has intensified cultural competition among nations, making cultural industries increasingly important for preserving national cultural identity, strengthening cultural sovereignty, and enhancing soft power in international relations (Nye, 2004). Consequently, the development of cultural industries has become an important strategic priority for many countries seeking to promote sustainable economic growth, national branding, and international cultural influence.

For Vietnam, the development of cultural industries has become increasingly important in the context of international integration, rapid urbanization, digital transformation, and the expansion of the knowledge economy. As a country possessing rich cultural resources, diverse ethnic traditions, and a large creative population, Vietnam holds substantial potential for developing cultural industries associated with tourism, cinema, music, performing arts, publishing, digital media, and creative design (Luong, 2018; Tu, 2017). However, despite significant cultural advantages, Vietnam's cultural industries continue to face numerous institutional, technological, and structural limitations that constrain their competitiveness and international influence. Therefore, examining the developmental foundations, opportunities, and challenges of cultural industries in Vietnam is not only academically significant but also practically important for promoting sustainable national development in the contemporary era.

2 Research methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach combining document analysis, policy analysis, and interdisciplinary literature review methods. The research focuses on examining the developmental foundations, opportunities, international experiences, and structural challenges associated with cultural industries in Vietnam within the broader context of globalization, digital transformation, and international integration.

Data were collected from multiple sources, including official policy documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam and the Government of Vietnam, UNESCO reports, World Bank statistics, international reports on cultural and creative industries, and previous academic studies related to cultural economics, creative industries, globalization, and cultural development. In particular, the study draws upon both international theoretical perspectives on cultural industries (Adorno & Bernstein, 2001; Huet, 1978; Bustamante, 2004) and Vietnamese scholarly works addressing the development of cultural industries in Vietnam and East Asia (Pham & Dang, 2014; Pham, 2015; Luong, 2018; Tu, 2017). These materials provide important theoretical and comparative foundations for analyzing the development of cultural industries in Vietnam within both regional and global contexts.

Comparative and interpretive analytical methods were applied to evaluate Vietnam's cultural resources, creative potential, institutional frameworks, policy orientations, and existing structural limitations affecting the development of cultural industries. The study also incorporates comparative observations from several Asian countries, particularly South Korea, Japan, and China, in order to identify potential lessons and development strategies relevant to Vietnam's contemporary conditions.

In addition, the research adopts a socio-cultural and developmental perspective to analyze how cultural industries contribute not only to economic growth but also to cultural identity preservation, creative innovation, cultural soft power, social cohesion, and sustainable national development in contemporary Vietnam. Through this interdisciplinary

approach, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing Vietnam's cultural industries in the era of globalization and digital transformation.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Foundations for the development of Cultural Industries in Vietnam. The exploitation of cultural values for economic purposes, thereby transforming culture into a driving force for national development, has long been a consistent policy orientation of the Communist Party and the State of Vietnam. The Documents of the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam emphasized the need to:

“Urgently implement the focused and strategic development of cultural industries and cultural services on the basis of identifying and promoting the soft power of Vietnamese culture while effectively applying the new values and achievements of global culture, science, technology, and innovation” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021).

As a country with a long historical tradition, culture has played a significant role in strengthening Vietnam's national capacity, international standing, and global reputation. Promoting the soft power of Vietnamese culture is therefore considered a crucial task in ensuring that culture becomes a solid spiritual foundation of society and an important endogenous force for sustainable national development. Vietnamese culture has shaped “the soul, spirit, and identity of the Vietnamese people, illuminating the glorious history of the nation” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1998).

In the current context of globalization and international integration, Vietnamese culture possesses increasing opportunities to expand its global influence. The beauty embedded in Vietnamese language, music, traditional arts, and humanistic communication practices not only constitutes an internal strength for sustainable national development but also generates cultural attraction beyond national borders. Vietnamese cultural values have increasingly attracted the interest of international audiences from diverse countries and cultural backgrounds. Numerous Vietnamese artistic troupes have received enthusiastic receptions during international performances, while many Vietnamese literary works have been translated into multiple languages, including President Ho Chi Minh's classical Chinese poetry, Nguyễn Du's *The Tale of Kieu*, and Tô Hoài's *Diary of a Cricket*.

To date, Vietnam has had dozens of cultural heritages recognized by UNESCO. Several Vietnamese performing arts traditions have been honored as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, including the *Space of Gong Culture in the Central Highlands* (recognized in 2005), *Hue Royal Court Music* (2008), *Quan Ho Folk Songs and Ca Tru Ceremonial Singing* (2009), the *Giong Festival* in Hanoi (2010), and the *Then Singing Practices* of the Tày, Nùng, and Thái ethnic groups (2019). These cultural heritages possess strong international appeal and contribute significantly to enriching global cultural civilization.

From a country once relatively absent from the global political map, Vietnam has now established diplomatic relations with nearly 200 countries and territories worldwide. Vietnam has increasingly participated in regional and global organizations and forums such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), ASEAN, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA), and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). The country has also successfully hosted major international events, including APEC Summits in 2006 and 2017, the ASEAN Summit in 2010, and the United States–North Korea Summit in 2019.

Through cultural diplomacy and various international cooperation channels, the world has gained a deeper understanding of Vietnam as a hospitable, resilient, peace-loving nation with thousands of years of civilization. Vietnam's international prestige and influence have steadily increased, while the country's cultural soft power has become an increasingly important driver of socio-economic development. Consequently, the development of cultural industries is regarded as a strategic breakthrough in promoting Vietnamese culture and people, enabling the country to further harness cultural values and human potential in pursuit of prosperity, happiness, and sustainable modernization.

Cultural industries encompass sectors that utilize creative talent and cultural capital in combination with technology and business skills to produce cultural goods and services. For example, the establishment of a film industry requires close and professional coordination among creative personnel (directors, screenwriters, actors), cultural resources, advanced technologies, and business strategies such as branding, audience development, and media promotion.

In these respects, Vietnam possesses important advantages, particularly in terms of creative human resources and cultural potential. Vietnamese people are widely recognized for their diligence and creativity. Vietnamese talent has been demonstrated across numerous fields, ranging from military strategy and scientific innovation to arts and cultural production. According to the 2020 Global Innovation Index (GII), Vietnam ranked 42nd out of 131 economies for the second consecutive year, ranking first among lower-middle-income economies and third in Southeast Asia.

Vietnam has also achieved relatively strong performances in international educational assessments such as PISA in mathematics, reading comprehension, and science. Furthermore, the country possesses many talented artists in music, cinema, fashion design, architecture, and visual arts. Vietnamese films, musical productions, fashion designs, and artistic photography have received awards at regional and international events.

Creative spaces and cultural-artistic events have rapidly expanded in major urban areas and are increasingly regarded as indicators of livable and innovative cities. Such spaces not only function as workplaces but also connect young entrepreneurs and creative communities. They have become symbolic destinations for Vietnamese youth and international cultural exchange. One notable example was the visit of former U.S. President Barack Obama to a creative startup space in Ho Chi Minh City on May 24, 2016, where he encouraged entrepreneurial innovation in Vietnam.

All these developments demonstrate the substantial potential of Vietnam's creative talents. In terms of cultural resources, Vietnam is proud of its rich traditions and remarkable cultural diversity. The coexistence of 54 ethnic groups over thousands of years has generated an invaluable treasure of historical sites, rituals, festivals, folk games, traditional crafts, folk songs, folk dances, cuisine, customs, legends, and heroic symbols. These elements provide abundant material for creative production and can inspire distinctive cultural products that both preserve national identity and create competitive advantages in global cultural markets.

Based on these foundations, the Vietnamese government introduced the *Strategy for the Development of Vietnam's Cultural Industries to 2020, with a Vision to 2030* in 2016. According to this strategy, cultural industries are expected to become important service-economic sectors characterized by significant improvements in both quality and scale. The strategy aims to contribute positively to economic growth and employment creation through the production of diverse and high-quality cultural goods and services that satisfy domestic cultural demands while

promoting exports and national cultural branding. Particular priority is given to sectors in which Vietnam possesses substantial potential and comparative advantages. Specifically, the strategy targeted cultural industries to contribute approximately 3% of GDP by 2020 and 7% by 2030, while also generating additional employment opportunities (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2016).

3.1.2 Challenges to the development of Cultural Industries in Vietnam. Despite certain achievements in recent years — including the contribution of cultural industries accounting for approximately 3.61% of Vietnam's GDP in 2019 (Supreme People's Court of Vietnam, 2021) — the development of cultural industries has not yet fully met expectations or maximized cultural values for sustainable development.

Vietnamese cultural and artistic products capable of achieving substantial international influence remain relatively limited. The reputations and brands of Vietnamese artists and creative professionals have not yet been firmly established at regional or global levels. Although many artistic products have emerged, few have developed into influential cultural trends. Cultural events are often organized inconsistently, while many creative spaces appear rapidly but disappear just as quickly.

As a result, Vietnam's cultural industries have not yet been exploited effectively in proportion to the country's rich cultural heritage and creative human potential. Vietnam does not lack creative talent or cultural capital; rather, it lacks a sufficiently supportive ecosystem capable of nurturing creativity, promoting national culture, and enabling creative individuals to flourish internationally. These limitations can be summarized in several major aspects.

First, Vietnam continues to face numerous bottlenecks in the exploitation and development of cultural industries. One of the most significant challenges is the limited awareness regarding the economic importance of cultural industries. Sectors such as cinema, fine arts, theater, and music are still not fully recognized as essential components of the national economy. Although market mechanisms have deeply penetrated many areas of social life, the cultural and artistic sectors remain relatively hesitant in affirming their commodity and market value.

Second, Vietnam still lacks effective coordination mechanisms for cultural industry development. The absence of a sufficiently strong coordinating body has created difficulties in establishing comprehensive developmental orientations. Among the twelve cultural sectors identified by the government, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism directly manages only five sectors, including cinema, performing arts, fine arts, photography and exhibitions, advertising, and cultural tourism. However, the development of cultural industries requires close collaboration among multiple ministries and sectors to generate synergistic effects not only for cultural industries themselves but also for the broader national economy. Consequently, weak institutional coordination has become a major obstacle to cultural industry development.

Third, creative education and business skills in Vietnam remain relatively underdeveloped. The Vietnamese educational system still contains several limitations that are not fully compatible with innovation-oriented development. Although educational reforms have increasingly encouraged creative practice among students, excessive academic workloads continue to limit the importance attached to arts and creativity-related subjects. Yet artistic education plays an important role in personality development, soft skills formation, and especially the cultivation of creativity. Without fostering creativity from an early age, it becomes difficult to develop future generations of creative citizens and cultural consumers capable of supporting the long-term growth of artistic and cultural markets.

3.1.3 International Experiences and Comparative Lessons for Vietnam.

The development of cultural industries in several Asian countries demonstrates that culture can become an important source of economic growth, national branding, and soft power when supported by effective institutional frameworks, technological innovation, and long-term strategic investment. In the contemporary global economy, cultural industries are increasingly recognized not only as economic sectors but also as instruments for enhancing national competitiveness and international influence (Nye, 2004). Experiences from countries such as South Korea, Japan, and China therefore provide valuable comparative lessons for Vietnam in the process of developing its own cultural industries within the context of globalization and digital transformation.

South Korea is widely regarded as one of the most successful examples of cultural industry development in Asia. Since the late 1990s, the South Korean government has implemented systematic policies to support cultural exports, digital media industries, cinema, music, and entertainment. Through strong state investment and coordinated public-private cooperation, South Korea successfully transformed culture into an important pillar of national economic growth and international soft power. The emergence of the “Korean Wave” (*Hallyu*) turned Korean popular culture into a global phenomenon through K-pop music, television dramas, cinema, fashion, and digital media platforms (Jin, 2016). The international success of groups such as BTS and Blackpink, together with award-winning films such as *Parasite*, illustrates how cultural products can simultaneously generate economic value, promote national branding, and strengthen international cultural influence. South Korea’s experience highlights the importance of strategic state support, investment in creative human resources, technological innovation, and the effective use of global digital networks in promoting cultural industries (Kim, 2005).

Japan also represents an influential model of cultural industry development through the successful globalization of anime, manga, video games, fashion, and creative design. Japanese cultural products have achieved worldwide popularity not only because of advanced technological production but also because they preserve distinctive national cultural characteristics. Japan has effectively transformed traditional cultural elements into modern creative products capable of attracting global audiences while maintaining a strong sense of cultural identity. This experience demonstrates that preserving cultural traditions while encouraging innovation can create unique competitive advantages in international cultural markets. Furthermore, the Japanese model emphasizes the importance of intellectual property protection, creative education, and long-term investment in cultural branding and creative ecosystems (Lash & Lury, 2007). The success of Japanese cultural industries also reflects the broader rise of the “creative economy,” in which creativity, knowledge, and symbolic value increasingly become key sources of economic development (Florida, 2002).

China, meanwhile, has rapidly expanded its cultural industries through strong state guidance, digital transformation strategies, and large-scale investment in media and cultural infrastructure. In recent years, China has prioritized the development of digital cultural industries, including online entertainment, digital publishing, gaming industries, film production, livestreaming platforms, and social media technologies. The rapid growth of corporations such as Tencent and ByteDance demonstrates how digital technology can fundamentally reshape cultural production, distribution, and consumption in the twenty-first century. At the same time, China has actively promoted cultural diplomacy and international cultural exchanges in order to strengthen its cultural soft power and global cultural presence (Keane, 2007). China’s experience illustrates the importance of integrating cultural development policies

with digital transformation strategies, technological innovation, and global communication networks.

At the global level, UNESCO has also emphasized that cultural and creative industries are increasingly becoming central components of sustainable development, employment generation, social inclusion, and cultural diversity preservation (UNESCO, 2013). In many countries, cultural industries have become important drivers of urban regeneration, tourism development, innovation, and youth employment. The global expansion of digital platforms and creative economies has further accelerated the international circulation of cultural products and services, creating new opportunities for developing countries to participate in global cultural markets.

From these international experiences, several important lessons can be drawn for Vietnam. First, the development of cultural industries requires a long-term strategic vision and consistent policy support from the State. Governmental support should extend beyond cultural preservation to include creativity promotion, technological innovation, digital transformation, and international competitiveness. Second, Vietnam needs to strengthen investment in creative education, digital literacy, cultural entrepreneurship, and human resource development in order to cultivate a new generation of creative professionals capable of competing in global cultural markets. Third, the country should prioritize the development of digital cultural platforms and creative ecosystems connecting artists, entrepreneurs, universities, technology sectors, and cultural institutions. Fourth, Vietnam should actively promote cultural branding and cultural exports by transforming traditional cultural values into modern creative products suitable for international audiences while preserving national identity.

Most importantly, international experiences demonstrate that successful cultural industries are not built solely upon financial investment but also upon the ability to balance globalization with national cultural identity. For Vietnam, this means that cultural industry development should simultaneously promote modernization, creativity, technological innovation, and international integration while preserving the distinctive cultural heritage and values that constitute the foundation of Vietnamese national identity and cultural soft power.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Development trends of Cultural Industries in Vietnam.

Within the context of Vietnam’s socialist-oriented market economy, the development of cultural industries is expected to evolve through multiple organizational forms, including sectors regulated primarily by market mechanisms, semi-industrial cultural sectors, and areas in which the State continues to play a central role. At the same time, cultural industries in Vietnam are undergoing structural reorganization in order to align more closely with the global configuration of contemporary cultural industries.

The socialization of cultural activities is also expected to become increasingly effective in the coming years. Furthermore, Vietnam’s cultural industries are gradually concentrating on highly competitive and dynamic sectors such as cultural tourism, publishing and media industries, film and television industries, music industries, and public entertainment services. In addition, cultural industries are increasingly developing toward diversification and interdisciplinary integration in order to satisfy both internal industrial demands and the growing cultural consumption needs of society.

The trend toward expanding joint ventures and international co-operation in the development of Vietnam’s cultural industries is also expected to deepen due to the increasing number of investment and trade agreements between Vietnam and international partners in both the present and future contexts. This process creates significant opportunities

for the development of cultural industries that combine national cultural identity with international integration.

The development of cultural industries is therefore not only a task associated with building an advanced culture deeply rooted in national identity but also a strategic sector for economic development. Cultural industries contribute simultaneously to national development and comprehensive human development. In this regard, the future development of Vietnam's cultural industries requires promoting the dynamism and creativity of state management agencies, cultural institutions, and enterprises from various economic sectors in order to produce high-quality cultural goods and services. These efforts are expected to contribute positively to meeting the increasingly diverse spiritual and cultural needs of the population, stimulating socio-economic growth, and expanding international cultural exchange and cooperation.

3.2.2 Several solutions for Developing Cultural Industries in Vietnam in the Next Phase.

Compared to many other industrial sectors, cultural industries emerged relatively late in Vietnam. However, they possess enormous developmental potential, high growth capacity, and the ability to generate substantial socio-economic benefits. As such, cultural industries are increasingly viewed as a new driving force for national development in accordance with global trends. In order to develop cultural industries within a market economy while simultaneously maintaining Vietnam's socialist orientation, several major groups of solutions should be implemented.

First, it is necessary to create stronger transformations in public awareness regarding the importance of building and developing an advanced Vietnamese culture deeply rooted in national identity. Culture must genuinely be regarded as the spiritual foundation of society and as both the objective and driving force of sustainable national development. This includes protecting and promoting the enduring values of Vietnamese cultural traditions, such as patriotism, national pride, community solidarity linking individuals, families, villages, and the nation, compassion and tolerance, respect for morality and social obligations, diligence and creativity in labor, willingness to sacrifice for national independence and public well-being, as well as subtlety in communication and simplicity in lifestyle (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1998). These values should be reflected in literature, the arts, cultural communication, and cultural diplomacy in order to enhance Vietnam's attractiveness to international audiences.

Second, Vietnam needs to further improve institutional frameworks and policy systems while promptly removing legal and administrative barriers that hinder the development of cultural industries. It is necessary to establish modern legal and institutional frameworks capable of mobilizing all available resources and creating favorable conditions for cultural industries to develop in accordance with market demands and international integration requirements. Preferential policies, simplified administrative procedures, and favorable business environments should be introduced to encourage investment in cultural industries. Priority should also be given to sectors with strong developmental potential and comparative advantages, such as cinema, performing arts, fine arts, photography, exhibitions, and cultural tourism. Simultaneously, greater support should be provided for contemporary artistic forms in order to gradually enhance the competitiveness of Vietnam's cultural industries.

Third, it is essential to develop a qualified workforce for cultural management and strengthen resources for cultural development. Human beings are both the subjects and products of culture; culture is created by people and exists for people. Therefore, the construction and development of culture fundamentally depend on cultural practitioners, particularly leadership and management personnel in cultural sectors. The preservation, promotion, and international dissemination of Vietnamese cultural values largely depend on the capabilities of

individuals working in culture and the arts, especially key cultural leaders and managers acting as cultural subjects. Consequently, Vietnam should prioritize the training and development of cultural administrators, policymakers, consultants, and managers who possess deep cultural understanding, professional competence, ethical qualities, and leadership capacity appropriate to contemporary developmental demands.

Fourth, Vietnam must proactively and actively promote international cultural integration. In the contemporary era of globalization, international integration has become an inevitable trend attracting increasing participation from countries and territories worldwide, including Vietnam. Accordingly, greater efforts should be devoted to promoting Vietnamese culture internationally, especially the "soft" dimensions of culture such as value systems, norms, and beliefs. Vietnam should also establish additional Vietnamese cultural centers and translation centers abroad while expanding international cultural cooperation through diverse forms of cultural diplomacy. These activities would help deepen Vietnam's international cultural relations and improve the practical effectiveness of cultural exchange initiatives.

Fifth, in the context of digital technology and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Vietnam should prioritize the focused development of cultural industries and cultural services while effectively integrating global achievements in culture, science, technology, and innovation. Cultural development should be closely linked with tourism and cultural services, thereby transforming tourism into a spearhead economic sector. Such integration would create interconnected benefits and strengthen international trust, enabling Vietnamese culture to expand more deeply and broadly within global cultural markets while helping the international community gain a more accurate understanding of Vietnam as a beautiful and culturally rich nation.

4 Conclusion

In the contemporary context of globalization, digital transformation, and international cultural integration, the development of cultural industries should no longer be viewed solely as an economic objective but also as a strategic foundation for strengthening national identity, cultural soft power, and sustainable development. In reality, cultural industries have increasingly been recognized as a modern production sector and a form of cultural productive force capable of generating both economic value and meaningful cultural-spiritual products for society.

For Vietnam, the development of cultural industries represents an important opportunity to transform the country's abundant cultural resources, creative human capital, and diverse ethnic heritage into competitive advantages within the global cultural economy. The rapid expansion of digital technology, creative entrepreneurship, cultural tourism, media industries, and international cultural exchange has created favorable conditions for Vietnam to integrate more deeply into regional and global cultural markets. At the same time, cultural industries can contribute significantly to employment generation, innovation, urban cultural development, and the promotion of Vietnam's international image.

However, the successful development of cultural industries in Vietnam requires more than cultural resources alone. It also demands comprehensive institutional reform, effective policy coordination, investment in creative education and human resources, technological innovation, and stronger cooperation between the State, private sector, and international partners. Without a supportive ecosystem for creativity and cultural entrepreneurship, Vietnam may struggle to fully capitalize on its substantial cultural potential in the era of globalization.

Ultimately, cultural industries are not merely economic sectors but also important instruments for preserving cultural identity, promoting

social cohesion, and enhancing national resilience in an increasingly interconnected world. Therefore, investing in cultural industries should be considered a long-term strategic priority for Vietnam's sustainable development. By combining traditional cultural values with creativity, technology, and international integration, Vietnam can gradually establish a more competitive and influential cultural industry capable of contributing not only to economic growth but also to the broader advancement of Vietnamese culture and society in the twenty-first century.

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Territorial Amazonian Psychology: Epistemological Foundations for a Psychology Situated in the Brazilian Amazon

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ABSTRACT

This study proposes the epistemological foundations of Territorial Amazonian Psychology as a situated theoretical-practical perspective for understanding subjectivities, experiences of psychological suffering, and collective forms of care produced within Amazonian territorialities. The study is a theoretical-epistemological essay grounded in a qualitative approach and based on a critical and interdisciplinary bibliographic review that articulates contributions from Latin American Community Psychology, Collective Mental Health, Epistemologies of the South, and decolonial studies. The analysis begins with a critique of the universalization of Eurocentric and urban-centered psychological models historically detached from the territorial, racial, cultural, and communal specificities of the Brazilian Amazon. It is argued that the coloniality of knowledge has contributed to the epistemological invisibilization of Amazonian experiences and to the marginalization of communal and ancestral care practices historically developed by Black, quilombola, Indigenous, riverine, and peripheral populations in the region. Within this context, Territorial Amazonian Psychology proposes understanding the Amazon not merely as a geographical space or empirical field of investigation, but as a territory that produces subjectivities, knowledge systems,...

Index Terms: Amazonian subjectivity • collective mental health • Epistemologies of the South • Territorial Amazonian Psychology • territorialization of psychological suffering

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Territorial Amazonian Psychology: Epistemological Foundations for a Psychology Situated in the Brazilian Amazon

Cláudio Afonso Soares*, Tereza Cristina Martins Kobaiashi, Marciane Lobato Costa, Priscila dos Santos Pereira Cardoso, Adriana Barbos Ribeiro, Adriele Cardoso Sussuarana, Ana Catarina Conceição Barros, Samara Santos Rabelo, and Geremias Mendes Sousa

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Keywords: *Amazonian subjectivity, collective mental health, Epistemologies of the South, Territorial Amazonian Psychology, territorialization of psychological suffering*

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1 Introduction

The historical development of Psychology as a modern scientific discipline occurred predominantly under the influence of Eurocentric, universalizing, and urban-centered epistemological frameworks. These frameworks were originally produced within specific European sociocultural contexts and later disseminated as universal models for understanding human subjectivity. In Latin America, and particularly in Brazil, this legacy contributed to the consolidation of psychological practices frequently detached from the historical, territorial, racial, and cultural specificities that shape the social experiences of diverse populations. Although Brazilian Psychology has increasingly incorporated social, community-based, and political perspectives over recent decades, theoretical frameworks capable of understanding the Amazon as a

territory that produces subjectivities, psychosocial experiences, and collective forms of care remain insufficient.

Historically, the Amazon has often been interpreted through external narratives that positioned it either as an exotic space or as an economic, environmental, and civilizational frontier. Such perspectives contributed to a continuous process of epistemological invisibilization of Amazonian experiences, particularly those of Black, quilombola, Indigenous, riverine, and peripheral populations. Their ways of life, community-based forms of organization, and ancestral care practices have frequently been marginalized by the rationality of modern Western science. In this context, Quijano's (2005) concept of the coloniality of power becomes particularly relevant, as it explains how colonial structures continue to shape the hierarchization of knowledge and the delegitimization of epistemologies produced outside hegemonic centers of power.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2010) argues that Western modernity established an “abyssal line” separating forms of knowledge considered scientifically legitimate from those classified as nonexistent or inferior. In the Brazilian Amazon, this dynamic is reflected in the fragility of situated theoretical production, the limited academic visibility of Amazonian experiences, and the recurrent application of psychological models developed in sociocultural realities profoundly different from Amazonian territorialities. Consequently, the psychological suffering experienced by Amazonian populations is often interpreted through decontextualized and individualizing frameworks that overlook the territorial, racial, historical, and collective dimensions involved in the production of subjectivity.

This issue becomes even more evident when considering the multiple forms of inequality present in the Brazilian Amazon. Structural racism, the precariousness of public policies, territorial invisibility, social violence, unequal access to mental health services, and the persistence of colonial legacies are directly associated with experiences of psychological suffering in the region. Fanon (2008) demonstrated that colonialism operates not only through economic and political domination but also through the subjective constitution of racialized individuals, producing profound psychosocial consequences associated with inferiorization, exclusion, and the denial of belonging. In the Amazon, these processes assume specific configurations shaped by Amazonian territorialities and by historical experiences of social and epistemological marginalization.

At the same time, the Amazon constitutes a territory of intense cultural, collective, and ancestral production. Collective practices such as Marabaixo, healing blessings, litanies, community rituals, oral traditions, and traditional knowledge systems represent not merely cultural expressions, but also historically constructed forms of collective elaboration of suffering, identity strengthening, and psychosocial care. These experiences challenge the limits of psychological approaches centered exclusively on individualizing models and biomedical rationalities, demanding perspectives capable of recognizing territory, ancestry, and collectivity as constitutive dimensions of Amazonian subjective experience.

It is within this context that the proposal of Territorial Amazonian Psychology emerges. More than a thematic or regional field within Psychology, Territorial Amazonian Psychology constitutes a situated theoretical-practical perspective committed to understanding subjective processes, experiences of psychological suffering, and collective forms of care from the standpoint of Amazonian territorialities. This proposal understands the Amazon not merely as a geographical space or empirical field of investigation, but as a legitimate epistemological territory capable of producing its own analytical categories for interpreting human experience in the region.

Unlike approaches that simply apply traditional psychological models to Amazonian realities, Territorial Amazonian Psychology seeks to produce Psychology from the Amazon. It recognizes that ways of existing, suffering, resisting, and caring in the region are shaped by specific historical, cultural, racial, environmental, and collective dimensions. Within this perspective, territory ceases to function merely as the background of human experience and becomes understood as an active element in the constitution of subjectivities, social relations, and practices of care.

Territorial Amazonian Psychology dialogues with contributions from Latin American Community Psychology, Collective Mental Health, Epistemologies of the South, and studies on coloniality and racial relations. However, its purpose is not merely to combine preexisting theoretical frameworks, but rather to construct a situated epistemological perspective capable of affirming the Amazon as a legitimate territory for

the production of psychological knowledge. In this sense, the proposal seeks to challenge the universalizing limits of hegemonic Psychology and to expand the psychological field through experiences produced within Amazonian territories.

Therefore, this study aims to propose the epistemological foundations of Territorial Amazonian Psychology as a situated theoretical-practical perspective for understanding subjective processes, experiences of psychological suffering, and collective forms of care in the Brazilian Amazon. Specifically, the study seeks to: (a) discuss the universalizing limits of traditional Psychology in understanding Amazonian experiences; (b) analyze the relationships between territory, coloniality, and subjectivity; (c) understand Afro-Amazonian cultural practices as collective technologies of care; and (d) present the theoretical foundations of Territorial Amazonian Psychology as a possibility for constructing a Psychology produced from the Amazon.

2 Method

This study is characterized as a theoretical-epistemological essay grounded in a qualitative approach and based on the critical and interdisciplinary analysis of theoretical frameworks related to Psychology, territoriality, coloniality, collective mental health, racial relations, and Epistemologies of the South. The theoretical essay constitutes a modality of scientific production aimed at the reflective construction of concepts, analytical categories, and critical interpretations concerning a given phenomenon, enabling the questioning of consolidated paradigms and the formulation of new epistemological perspectives within the scientific field (Demo, 2000; Meneghetti, 2011).

The choice of this methodological design is justified by the nature of the proposal developed in this study, whose objective is to construct the epistemological foundations of Territorial Amazonian Psychology as a situated theoretical-practical perspective for understanding subjectivities, experiences of psychological suffering, and collective forms of care produced within Amazonian territorialities. In this sense, the study is not oriented toward the production of quantitative empirical evidence or the testing of experimental hypotheses. Rather, it is based on the critical articulation of theoretical frameworks capable of supporting the conceptual construction of the proposed perspective.

The investigation was developed through a narrative and interpretative bibliographic review involving national and international authors from the fields of Latin American Community Psychology, Collective Mental Health, decolonial studies, racial relations, territoriality studies, and critical epistemologies. The main theoretical references mobilized include the contributions of Fanon (1968, 2008), Quijano (2005), Mbembe (2018), Santos (2000, 2010), Santos (2006, 2019), Haesbaert (2016), Martín-Baró (2017), Montero (2004), Gonzalez (2020), Bispo dos Santos (2015, 2023), and Amarante (2007). These authors provide theoretical support for analyzing the relationships among territory, coloniality, subjectivity, and collective practices of care.

The analytical pathway was organized around five central axes:

- (a) Coloniality and the epistemological invisibilization of the Amazon;
- (b) Territory and the production of Amazonian subjectivities;
- (c) Collective mental health and the territorialization of psychological suffering;
- (d) Ancestral knowledge and Afro-Amazonian technologies of care; and
- (e) Epistemological foundations of Territorial Amazonian Psychology.

These axes were articulated interdisciplinarily in order to integrate contributions from Psychology, Collective Health, Sociology, Philosophy, Education, and decolonial studies into the construction of the theoretical proposal presented herein.

The methodological perspective adopted in this study recognizes that scientific knowledge is not produced in a neutral or decontextualized manner, but is traversed by historical, territorial, cultural, and political conditions (Quijano, 2005; Santos, 2010). Thus, the study is grounded in the assumption that Amazonian experiences possess their own epistemological potential and can contribute to the critical expansion of traditional forms of understanding subjectivity within the psychological field (Martín-Baró, 2017; Montero, 2004; Santos, 2010).

Furthermore, this essay adopts the epistemological position that the Brazilian Amazon should not be understood merely as an empirical field of investigation, but as a territory capable of producing legitimate knowledge, experiences, and analytical categories. Accordingly, Territorial Amazonian Psychology is developed from a critical and situated perspective committed to valuing Amazonian territorialities, Black and traditional ancestralities, and collective experiences of care historically rendered invisible by hegemonic paradigms of modern science.

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 Coloniality and the invisibilization of the Amazon in psychological knowledge production

The historical constitution of Psychology as a scientific field occurred predominantly under strong Eurocentric influence, marked by the universalization of theoretical models produced in urbanized and industrialized sociocultural contexts distinct from Latin American and Amazonian realities. In Brazil, this process contributed to the consolidation of a Psychology frequently centered on individualizing and universalizing perspectives, with limited sensitivity to the territorial, racial, cultural, and historical specificities that shape the country's diverse social contexts.

Within this scenario, the Amazon was historically positioned more as an exotic object of observation than as a territory capable of producing legitimate knowledge. This dynamic is directly related to what Quijano (2005) conceptualized as the coloniality of power, that is, the persistence of colonial structures of knowledge hierarchization even after the formal end of colonialism. Coloniality produces not only economic and political inequalities, but also mechanisms of epistemological invisibilization that marginalize knowledge produced outside major hegemonic centers.

Santos (2010) argues that modern scientific knowledge historically established an "abyssal line," separating forms of knowledge considered legitimate from those classified as nonexistent or inferior. In this context, Amazonian cultural, collective, and ancestral experiences frequently remain excluded from dominant scientific narratives, producing a process of epistemicide that affects Indigenous, quilombola, riverine, and Black populations in the Brazilian Amazon.

Fanon (2008) contributes to this discussion by demonstrating that the effects of colonialism extend beyond political and economic dimensions, profoundly affecting subjective processes and the psychic constitution of racialized individuals. In the Amazon, the impacts of coloniality manifest through historical experiences of social exclusion, structural racism, territorial precariousness, and denial of belonging, directly shaping the ways Amazonian populations suffer, exist, and resist.

Territorial Amazonian Psychology emerges precisely from the critique of this epistemological invisibilization. Its proposal is to understand the Amazon not merely as a geographical space, but as a territory that produces subjectivities, collective experiences, and its own forms of psychosocial care. It therefore constitutes an epistemological displacement aimed at producing Psychology from the Amazon, rather than merely about the Amazon.

3.2 Territory and the production of subjectivities in the Amazon

The concept of territory occupies a central role in the construction of Territorial Amazonian Psychology. Unlike perspectives that understand territory merely as a spatial or geographical delimitation, this proposal conceives territory as a living dimension of human experience, traversed by relations of belonging, memory, identity, violence, resistance, and subjective production.

Santos (2006) conceptualizes territory as a socially produced space constituted through human relations, economic flows, political dynamics, and forms of life organized within it. From this perspective, territory is not merely the setting of existence, but an active element in the constitution of both individual and collective subjectivities.

Haesbaert (2016) expands this understanding through the concept of multiterritoriality, emphasizing that individuals simultaneously experience multiple forms of territorial, cultural, and symbolic belonging. In the Amazon, these territorialities are shaped by experiences marked by social inequalities, historical displacements, racialization, environmental conflicts, and ongoing disputes over cultural recognition.

Within this context, Amazonian subjectivity cannot be understood separately from the concrete territorial conditions that structure social life in the region. Psychological suffering, experiences of exclusion, community bonds, and collective strategies of care are deeply influenced by the relationships established among subject, territory, and historicity.

Mbembe (2018) contributes to this discussion by demonstrating how certain racialized territories become spaces of precarious life conditions, where structural violence and the denial of rights produce specific forms of social suffering. In the Brazilian Amazon, these processes manifest through inequalities in access to mental health services, the invisibilization of traditional populations, environmental racism, and the fragility of territorialized public policies.

Territorial Amazonian Psychology therefore proposes that subjective processes should be understood through Amazonian territorialities, recognizing that territory actively participates in the production of suffering, resistance, and possibilities for collective care.

3.3 Collective mental health and the territorialization of psychological suffering

The biomedical and individualizing tradition of mental health has historically privileged interpretations centered on the isolated individual, frequently neglecting the social, racial, cultural, and territorial determinants involved in the production of psychological suffering. In contrast, the perspective of collective mental health proposes understanding human suffering as a phenomenon traversed by historical, social, and political dimensions.

Basaglia and the Italian Psychiatric Reform played a fundamental role in shifting the understanding of madness and mental suffering from an exclusively medical field to a broader social field. In Brazil, authors such as Amarante (2007) contributed to consolidating a psychosocial perspective of care grounded in human rights, territorialized care practices, and the valorization of collective experiences.

Territorial Amazonian Psychology directly dialogues with this tradition by recognizing that psychological suffering in the Brazilian Amazon cannot be analyzed separately from territorial inequalities, structural racism, historical exclusion, and colonial legacies present in the region.

Within this context, the concept of the territorialization of psychological suffering is proposed as the process through which experiences of suffering are produced, intensified, or shaped by the territorial, racial, economic, and cultural conditions experienced by Amazonian populations.

Martín-Baró (2017) argues that psychological suffering in Latin American contexts frequently expresses broader social contradictions related to structural violence, exclusion, and historical oppression. This understanding becomes particularly relevant in the Amazon, where Black, quilombola, Indigenous, and peripheral populations coexist with multiple forms of social precariousness and institutional invisibility.

From this perspective, mental health ceases to be understood merely as an individual phenomenon and becomes recognized as a collective, territorial, and politically situated experience. Psychological care therefore requires practices sensitive to Amazonian territorialities, community networks, and cultural forms of elaborating suffering.

4 Ancestral knowledge and Afro-Amazonian care practices

Amazonian ancestral knowledge systems constitute important historical forms of collectively elaborating life, suffering, and cultural resistance. These practices involve knowledge transmitted orally across generations, integrating spiritual, communal, bodily, and territorial dimensions of care.

For long periods, such practices were disqualified by modern scientific rationalism and frequently interpreted as superstition, backwardness, or folklore. However, scholars associated with Epistemologies of the South have demonstrated that these forms of knowledge constitute legitimate systems for producing knowledge and organizing collective life.

Gonzalez (2020) highlights that Black cultural experiences in Latin America generated their own forms of resistance and survival in response to the violence of structural racism. In the Amazon, Afro-Amazonian cultural manifestations such as Marabaixo represent not only artistic or religious expressions, but also collective spaces of belonging, memory, and psychosocial care.

Bispo dos Santos (2015) proposes understanding traditional knowledge systems as counter-colonial forms of existence capable of producing alternative rationalities and other ways of relating to the world. This perspective allows practices such as prayers, healing blessings, litanies, oral traditions, spirituality, and collective rituals to be recognized as ancestral technologies of care.

Within Territorial Amazonian Psychology, such practices are not interpreted as peripheral cultural elements, but as collective strategies for producing mental health, strengthening communities, and fostering subjective resistance in the face of multiple forms of territorial and racial oppression.

Thus, Afro-Amazonian care emerges as a central category for understanding collective forms of elaborating suffering in the Brazilian Amazon, expanding the traditional limits of Psychology and enabling dialogue among science, culture, ancestry, and territory.

5 Community psychology, Epistemologies of the South, and the construction of Territorial Amazonian Psychology

Latin American Community Psychology represents an important foundation for the construction of Territorial Amazonian Psychology because it understands individuals through their community, historical, and political relationships. Unlike perspectives centered exclusively on individual adaptation, this approach emphasizes social participation, community strengthening, and the transformation of living conditions.

Montero (2004) argues that Latin American Community Psychology emerged from an ethical-political commitment to historically marginalized populations, recognizing that subjective processes are inseparable from concrete conditions of existence. Similarly, Martín-Baró (2017) proposed a Psychology of Liberation committed to Latin American

realities and to overcoming structures of oppression produced by coloniality.

The Epistemologies of the South, particularly developed by Santos (2010), also provide significant theoretical support for Territorial Amazonian Psychology by advocating for the recognition of forms of knowledge historically rendered invisible by hegemonic scientific thought. This perspective enables the Amazon to be understood as a legitimate space for theoretical production, challenging the logic of epistemological dependence on dominant academic centers.

Territorial Amazonian Psychology thus emerges as a situated theoretical-practical proposal committed to understanding Amazonian subjectivities in their territorial, cultural, racial, collective, and historical dimensions. Its construction does not seek to reject classical psychological frameworks, but rather to challenge their universalizing limits and expand the psychological field through experiences produced within the Brazilian Amazon.

In this sense, the proposal affirms the Amazon not merely as an empirical field of research, but as a territory capable of producing concepts, analytical categories, and new possibilities for understanding human experience.

6 Epistemological foundations of Territorial Amazonian Psychology

The construction of Territorial Amazonian Psychology emerges from the need to develop a situated psychological perspective capable of understanding subjective experiences produced within Amazonian territorialities through their historical, racial, cultural, communal, and political specificities. More than a thematic expansion of Brazilian Psychology, this proposal constitutes an epistemological displacement that challenges the universalizing limits of modern psychological traditions and claims the Amazon as a legitimate territory for conceptual production.

Historically, Psychology consolidated itself as a scientific field guided by the search for universal models capable of explaining human behavior, often detached from the concrete conditions of existence experienced by individuals. Although critical approaches have expanded the understanding of the relationships between subjectivity and social context, theoretical frameworks produced in urban and academic centers distant from Amazonian realities continue to predominate. Consequently, territorial experiences marked by ancestry, collectivity, racialization, and coloniality remain insufficiently contemplated within traditional psychological categories.

Territorial Amazonian Psychology seeks to overcome this limitation through the construction of a situated epistemology. The concept of situated epistemology refers to the understanding that all knowledge is produced within specific historical, cultural, territorial, and political contexts. Absolute neutrality in scientific production does not exist; every theory emerges from particular historical experiences and social arrangements. Producing Psychology from the Amazon therefore implies recognizing that Amazonian experiences possess their own epistemological potential.

The proposal is grounded in five interconnected epistemological axes: territoriality, coloniality, collectivity, ancestry, and cultural resistance. These axes should not be understood as isolated categories, but as interconnected dimensions of Amazonian subjective experience.

Territoriality constitutes the first epistemological foundation of Territorial Amazonian Psychology. Territory is understood not merely as physical space, but as a constitutive dimension of subjectivity. Human experiences are produced through direct relationships with ways of life, social inequalities, collective memories, community bonds, and

forms of territorial belonging (Haesbaert, 2016; Santos, 2006). In the Amazon, territory actively participates in the production of suffering, resistance, and psychosocial care possibilities, particularly in contexts shaped by historical inequalities, racialization, and socioenvironmental conflicts (Costa, 2020; Porto-Gonçalves, 2001). This understanding also dialogues with international perspectives that recognize territory and place as central dimensions of subjective constitution and psychosocial experience (Hook, 2005; Massey, 1994; Tuan, 1977).

Coloniality represents the second epistemological axis of the proposal. The Brazilian Amazon has historically been traversed by processes of exploitation, racialization, and epistemological invisibilization that directly affect the constitution of Amazonian subjectivities (Quijano, 2005; Santos, 2010). Coloniality operates not only at political and economic levels, but also in the production of identities, modes of belonging, and forms of psychological suffering (Fanon, 2008; Mbembe, 2018). In the Amazon, these processes are related to the historical persistence of structural racism, territorial marginalization, and the denial of social recognition experienced by Black, Indigenous, quilombola, and riverine populations (Gonzalez, 2020; Porto-Gonçalves, 2001). Understanding Amazonian subjectivity therefore requires recognizing the psychosocial effects of colonial legacies, especially their implications for identity, territorial belonging, and social suffering (Hook, 2005; Martín-Baró, 2017).

The third foundation corresponds to collectivity as a structuring dimension of Amazonian experience. Unlike the individualizing rationalities predominant in Western modernity, many Amazonian experiences are organized through community relations, solidarity networks, and collective forms of elaborating life (Martín-Baró, 2017; Montero, 2004). In the Amazon, communal practices historically constituted important mechanisms of social survival, territorial belonging, and identity strengthening among Black, Indigenous, quilombola, and riverine populations (Bispo dos Santos, 2015; Porto-Gonçalves, 2001). Subjectivity, from this perspective, is produced relationally and collectively, inseparable from the social, cultural, and territorial bonds established by individuals (Bruner, 1997; Vygotsky, 1991). This understanding also dialogues with critical perspectives in Community Psychology and Cultural Psychology, which recognize subjective processes as historically situated and socially shared constructions (Geertz, 1989; Hook, 2005).

Ancestry constitutes the fourth epistemological axis of Territorial Amazonian Psychology. Afro-Amazonian cultural practices, traditional knowledge systems, oral traditions, community rituals, and ancestral technologies of care represent important forms of mental health production and subjective strengthening (Bispo dos Santos, 2015; Hampâté Bâ, 2010). In the Amazon, cultural experiences such as Marabaixo, prayers, healing blessings, and collective spiritual practices constitute important mechanisms of community belonging, memory preservation, and cultural resistance in the face of the persistence of coloniality and structural racism (Gonzalez, 2020; Nascimento, 1980).

Ancestry is not understood merely as the preservation of the past, but as a living dimension of collective experience capable of organizing belonging, sustaining memory, and producing strategies of resistance against historical inequalities (Mbembe, 2018; Sodr , 2017). This understanding also dialogues with African and Afro-diasporic perspectives that recognize ancestral memory and oral traditions as legitimate forms of knowledge production, subjectivity construction, and collective care (Oy w m , 1997; Wiredu, 1998).

Finally, cultural resistance emerges as the fifth epistemological foundation of the proposal. Amazonian cultural practices do not merely represent symbolic manifestations, but also collective strategies of psychosocial survival in the face of coloniality, structural racism,

and territorial precariousness (Fanon, 2008; Mbembe, 2018). In the Amazon, Afro-Amazonian cultural manifestations such as Marabaixo, collective rituals, oral traditions, and communal forms of care constitute important mechanisms of identity strengthening, collective memory preservation, and the elaboration of social suffering (Bispo dos Santos, 2015; Gonzalez, 2020).

These practices operate as forms of cultural and territorial resistance against historical processes of invisibilization and social exclusion experienced by Black and traditional Amazonian populations (Nascimento, 1980; Porto-Gonçalves, 2001). Furthermore, perspectives from Community Psychology and Collective Mental Health recognize that collective cultural experiences can produce belonging, subjective strengthening, and psychosocial support in contexts marked by inequality and social vulnerability (Amarante, 2007; Montero, 2004).

Territorial Amazonian Psychology therefore argues that subjective processes cannot be understood separately from Amazonian territorialities. Psychological suffering, forms of care, community bonds, and experiences of cultural resistance are produced within specific historical contexts profoundly shaped by the relationships among territory, coloniality, race, culture, and social inequality.

This perspective also implies reconsidering the methodological limits of Psychology itself. The exclusive valorization of modern technical-scientific rationalities proves insufficient for understanding the complexity of Amazonian experiences. Territorial Amazonian Psychology therefore advocates for dialogue among science, ancestral knowledge systems, community practices, and Epistemologies of the South, recognizing the plurality of legitimate forms of knowledge production.

Rather than establishing a new closed or homogeneous psychological approach, Territorial Amazonian Psychology seeks to open possibilities for constructing a Psychology committed to Amazonian realities and to populations historically rendered invisible by the hegemonic paradigms of modern science. It therefore affirms the Amazon not merely as an empirical field of investigation, but as an epistemological territory capable of producing concepts, analytical categories, and new possibilities for understanding human experience.

In this sense, Figure 1 below synthesizes the main conceptual foundations of Territorial Amazonian Psychology, illustrating the relationships among coloniality, Amazonian territorialities, subjectivity, territorial suffering, and collective technologies of care in the constitution of the epistemological proposal presented in this study.



Figure 1. Epistemological Foundations of Territorial Amazonian Psychology

Source: Prepared by the author (2025)

7 Theoretical and practical developments of Territorial Amazonian Psychology

The consolidation of Territorial Amazonian Psychology as a situated epistemological proposal implies not only the formulation of new theoretical frameworks, but also the construction of concrete possibilities for psychological intervention committed to Amazonian territorialities. In this sense, the proposal extends beyond the limits of an exclusively conceptual discussion by presenting direct implications for clinical psychology, collective mental health, school and educational psychology, professional training, and psychological research.

By recognizing that subjective processes are traversed by territory, coloniality, race, ancestry, and collectivity, Territorial Amazonian Psychology proposes important shifts in traditional ways of understanding psychological care. Its purpose is to challenge universalizing models and

promote practices that are more sensitive to the historical and cultural specificities of the Brazilian Amazon.

7.1 Territorialized clinical psychology and situated listening

Within the clinical field, Territorial Amazonian Psychology proposes an expanded understanding of psychological suffering. Unlike approaches centered exclusively on intrapsychic or individual dimensions, this perspective recognizes that human suffering is produced in constant relation to territorial, racial, historical, and communal experiences.

A territorialized clinical practice requires a psychologically situated form of listening capable of recognizing the social, cultural, and territorial dimensions involved in the subjective constitution of Amazonian individuals. This implies understanding that experiences related to structural racism, territorial exclusion, social invisibility, and the precariousness of public policies directly participate in the production of psychological suffering in the Amazon.

Within this framework, clinical listening no longer seeks exclusively the individual adaptation of the subject, but also considers the concrete conditions of existence shaping subjective experience. Amazonian subjectivity is understood as the result of multiple relationships involving territory, collective memory, cultural belonging, ancestry, and social inequality.

Territorial Amazonian Psychology also proposes expanding the dialogue between clinical psychology and collective practices of care. Afro-Amazonian cultural experiences, spirituality, oral traditions, community bonds, and ancestral technologies of care may constitute important resources for subjective strengthening and collective elaboration of suffering, particularly within contexts historically marked by territorial and racial invisibilization.

7.2 School psychology, inclusion, and Amazonian territorialities

In the field of school and educational psychology, the proposal highlights the need to construct practices committed to the cultural and territorial specificities of the Brazilian Amazon. Traditional schooling models frequently disregard Amazonian realities, reproducing curricula, methodologies, and pedagogical practices insufficiently sensitive to the collective and cultural experiences present in the region.

Territorial Amazonian Psychology proposes understanding educational processes beyond individualizing interpretations of school difficulties. Issues related to school failure, educational exclusion, learning difficulties, and inclusion processes must also be analyzed in relation to territorial inequalities, concrete living conditions, and processes of cultural invisibilization present within Amazonian educational contexts.

Within this scenario, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) may be reinterpreted through Amazonian territorialities, expanding its pedagogical dimension to include cultural diversity, traditional knowledge systems, and community-based experiences. School inclusion, from this perspective, is not limited to formal access to educational spaces, but also involves territorial recognition, cultural belonging, and the valorization of multiple forms of knowledge production.

The proposal also emphasizes the importance of strengthening territorialized school psychological practices capable of engaging with Amazonian community experiences and recognizing Amazonian individuals as legitimate producers of culture, knowledge, and educational practices.

7.3 Collective mental health and the territorialization of care

Within the field of collective mental health, Territorial Amazonian Psychology proposes strengthening territorialized and culturally situated practices of care. Although the Brazilian Psychosocial Care Network (RAPS) represents an important advance in national mental health policy, it still faces significant implementation challenges within Amazonian territories, particularly due to regional inequalities and the historical fragility of public policies in the region.

The territorialization of care implies recognizing that mental health practices must directly engage with the communal, cultural, and territorial experiences of Amazonian populations. Psychosocial care therefore ceases to be understood merely as the technical provision of specialized services and begins to include community networks, collective cultural practices, ancestral knowledge systems, and local experiences of subjective strengthening.

Within this context, Afro-Amazonian cultural experiences may play an important role in promoting collective mental health. Practices such as Marabaixo, community circles, collective rituals, healing blessings, and oral traditions foster belonging, community strengthening, and symbolic elaboration of suffering, constituting important strategies of psychosocial resistance.

Territorial Amazonian Psychology therefore proposes an expanded understanding of mental health committed to the territorial determinants of psychological suffering and to the valorization of collective care practices present within Amazonian experiences.

7.4 Psychology training and the production of situated knowledge

Another important development of this proposal concerns professional training in Psychology. Psychology curricula in Brazil remain strongly influenced by Eurocentric and urban-centered frameworks, frequently neglecting the historical and territorial specificities of the Brazilian Amazon.

Territorial Amazonian Psychology advocates for educational processes committed to Amazonian realities and to populations historically rendered invisible by modern science. This implies expanding discussions concerning coloniality, territory, racial relations, ancestry, collective mental health, and Epistemologies of the South within Psychology training programs.

More than simply including regional content in curricula, the proposal seeks to recognize the Amazon as a legitimate territory for the production of psychological knowledge. Professional training in Psychology should therefore enable future psychologists to understand the relationships among subjectivity, territory, social inequality, and culture, strengthening territorialized psychological practices committed to Amazonian realities.

Within the field of research, the proposal also highlights the importance of developing methodologies sensitive to Amazonian territorialities. Oral traditions, collective memory, community narratives, and traditional cultural practices should be recognized as important methodological possibilities for the production of situated psychological knowledge.

Thus, the theoretical and practical developments of Territorial Amazonian Psychology demonstrate that the proposal extends beyond the construction of an abstract conceptual category. Rather, it constitutes a perspective committed to transforming psychological practices, professional training, scientific production, and mental health policies in the Brazilian Amazon.

8 Final Considerations

This study sought to propose the epistemological foundations of Territorial Amazonian Psychology as a situated theoretical-practical perspective for understanding subjectivities, experiences of psychological suffering, and collective forms of care produced within Amazonian territorialities. Throughout the study, it was argued that the Brazilian Amazon should no longer be understood merely as a peripheral space for the application of psychological models developed in distinct sociocultural contexts, but rather as a legitimate territory for conceptual, epistemological, and scientific production within the field of Psychology.

The critique of the universalization of Eurocentric psychological frameworks demonstrated that subjective processes do not develop in an abstract or decontextualized manner. Instead, they are traversed by territory, race, ancestry, coloniality, social inequality, and collective experiences of existence. In this sense, Territorial Amazonian Psychology proposes a fundamental epistemological displacement: understanding Amazonian subjectivity through Amazonian territorialities and recognizing that the forms of suffering, resistance, belonging, and care produced in the region possess their own historical and cultural specificities.

By articulating contributions from Latin American Community Psychology, Collective Mental Health, Epistemologies of the South, and decolonial studies, the proposal presented here challenges the individualizing and universalizing limits of modern Psychology. More

than simply incorporating regional themes into the psychological field, Territorial Amazonian Psychology affirms the need to construct analytical categories produced from Amazonian experiences themselves, capable of recognizing the centrality of territory, collectivity, ancestry, and cultural practices in the constitution of Amazonian subjectivities.

The notion of the territorialization of psychological suffering developed throughout this study demonstrated that experiences of suffering in the Brazilian Amazon are deeply related to territorial inequalities, structural racism, the precariousness of public policies, social invisibility, and the persistence of coloniality. From this perspective, psychological suffering ceases to be interpreted exclusively as an individual phenomenon and becomes understood as a territorially situated experience produced through the relationships among subject, territory, history, and social structure.

Similarly, recognizing collective technologies of care and Afro-Amazonian practices of community strengthening expands the epistemological horizons of Psychology itself. Experiences such as Marabaixo, oral traditions, healing blessings, collective rituals, Amazonian spiritualities, and ancestral knowledge systems reveal historically constructed forms of elaborating suffering, producing belonging, and sustaining subjectivity in the face of multiple forms of social violence present in the region. Such experiences should not be interpreted as peripheral or folkloric elements, but as legitimate expressions of psychosocial care and cultural resistance.

Territorial Amazonian Psychology does not seek to completely replace classical psychological frameworks, nor does it aim to establish an isolated regional perspective detached from broader scientific debates. Rather, its proposal is to critically expand the epistemological horizons of Brazilian Psychology by incorporating Amazonian territorialities as central dimensions of subjective production and mental health care. In this sense, the proposal advocates for a Psychology committed to populations historically rendered invisible by the coloniality of knowledge and sensitive to the multiple forms of existence present within the Brazilian Amazon.

Beyond its theoretical implications, the proposal also points toward important practical developments in clinical psychology, collective mental health, school and educational psychology, professional training, and scientific research. The defense of territorialized and culturally situated psychological practices represents a concrete possibility for strengthening public policies that are more responsive to Amazonian realities and to collective forms of care produced within regional territories.

Finally, Territorial Amazonian Psychology should be understood less as a completed theory than as an open epistemological, political, and ethical agenda. Its consolidation will depend on the strengthening of future research, the expansion of academic networks committed to decolonial and territorial perspectives, the valorization of traditional knowledge systems, and the construction of psychological practices committed to the plurality of Amazonian experiences.

By affirming the Amazon as a territory that produces subjectivities, knowledge, and its own forms of collective care, this study advocates for the possibility of constructing a Psychology produced from the Amazon, capable of recognizing territory, ancestry, collectivity, and cultural resistance as constitutive dimensions of human experience. More than proposing a new theoretical category, Territorial Amazonian Psychology represents the defense of a psychological science committed to life, memory, Amazonian peoples, and the construction of alternative possibilities for existence and care within the contemporary Brazilian context.

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The “Princess Leia” Effect: Maximizing L2 Student Responses to Avatar Chatbots

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ABSTRACT

This study reports on the latest stage of a collaborative project at the University of Tennessee (Knoxville, TN, USA). The objective of the project was to design an avatar chatbot (Slabot) capable of eliciting L2 oral responses in Spanish from students and evaluating them according to the criteria established by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). After an initial test of Slabot in the spring of 2025 yielded positive results, the present study was conducted in the fall of 2025 in an upper-level undergraduate university course. Of the 19 students who participated, one student's response reached an aggregate length appropriate for an ACTFL evaluation, and evidence for awarding a particular ACTFL rating is documented. This study concludes that Slabot's design contributed significantly to the length of this response (24 min 53 s). More broadly, this study suggests that linking an avatar chatbot's physical features to course content, rather than having students interact with avatar chatbots whose identity is unknown to them, not only facilitates the assignment of an ACTFL ranking but also provides students with an incentive to develop their L2 skills independently.

Index Terms: ACTFL • ACTFL OPic • asynchronous online course • avatar chatbot • El laberinto del fauno (Pan's Labyrinth) • upper-level university course in Spanish

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No generative AI was used for analysis or results.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The “Princess Leia” Effect: Maximizing L2 Student Responses to Avatar Chatbots

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Abstract

This study reports on the latest stage of a collaborative project at the University of Tennessee (Knoxville, TN, USA). The objective of the project was to design an avatar chatbot (Slabot) capable of eliciting L2 oral responses in Spanish from students and evaluating them according to the criteria established by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). After an initial test of Slabot in the spring of 2025 yielded positive results, the present study was conducted in the fall of 2025 in an upper-level undergraduate university course. Of the 19 students who participated, one student's response reached an aggregate length appropriate for an ACTFL evaluation, and evidence for awarding a particular ACTFL rating is documented. This study concludes that Slabot's design contributed significantly to the length of this response (24 min 53 s). More broadly, this study suggests that linking an avatar chatbot's physical features to course content, rather than having students interact with avatar chatbots whose identity is unknown to them, not only facilitates the assignment of an ACTFL ranking but also provides students with an incentive to develop their L2 skills independently.

Keywords: ACTFL, ACTFL OPIc, asynchronous online course, avatar chatbot, *El laberinto del fauno* (Pan's Labyrinth), upper-level university course in Spanish

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1 Introduction

In Episode IV of *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977), Princess Leia accomplishes what language teachers aim to achieve in their courses: inspiring students to develop their L2 skills independently. The Princess accomplishes this by using what would today be called an avatar chatbot, which is modeled on Leia and projected by R2D2 to heighten the urgency of the task she communicates. This task requires that the viewers of the avatar chatbot, Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi, demonstrate their proficiency in saving the galaxy by defeating the Dark Side, which they ultimately do. The present study concludes that the physical appearance of an avatar chatbot, like that of Leia, can be an important component of achieving an L2 objective. This confirms theories advanced in research on the form of avatar chatbots, which underscore the importance of designing them as recognizable figures to motivate student engagement. The conclusions in this study were reached through analysis of data collected during an experiment in the fall of 2025 involving an innovative avatar chatbot, or Second Language Acquisition chatbot (Slabot). The design of Slabot, its personalization in the spirit of the image projected by R2D2, provided students with a platform to use their L2 oral skills and the instructor with a means of evaluating those skills according to American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) criteria.

2 Review of Related Literature

Research (Chen et al., 2022) has established a link between interaction with avatar chatbots and the motivation to learn independently. In addition, research on the importance of designing avatar chatbots to promote interaction has highlighted the usefulness of their realistic representation. Chaves and Gerosa (2021) assert that interaction between humans and avatar chatbots is affected by “adopting or neglecting—a particular characteristic [that] may influence the way humans perceive the chatbots.” With respect to personification, or an avatar chatbot's “perceived identity and personality representations” (Chaves and Gerosa, 2021), studies (Gong, 2008; Koda, 2003) have revealed that human-like characteristics enhance interaction. Research (Qin et al., 2024; Schmitt and Buschek, 2021; Sun et al., 2023) also indicates that the anthropomorphizing of fictional avatar chatbots contributes to conceptualized responses by humans who interact with them.

These studies essentially confirm the effectiveness of what occurred “a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away,” according to the plot of *Star Wars*. In this context, it merits pointing out that Princess Leia directs her message to Obi-Wan Kenobi, an old acquaintance of the Princess. On the other hand, Luke Skywalker sees the Princess for the first time before Kenobi, at a prior moment in the film. In this scene, “*Star Wars IV Luke finds the message*,” Luke is attempting to repair a recently purchased R2D2, when he stumbles across a recorded message carried by the droid. Although the Princess does not ask Skywalker to respond to questions as Slabot does, her message convinces him to act (find Kenobi) in part because of what she says (“Help me Obi-Wan Kenobi, you're

my only hope”) but also because of her appearance. Skywalker’s facial expressions and the fact that he says, “Who is she? She’s beautiful,” reveal that he is pleased by the physical characteristics of the image of Leia projected by R2D2. The recording of the video by Leia, whose representation via R2D2 accentuates the real Leia’s physical features, underscores the importance of design in ensuring that the objective of an exercise is met. Just as Leia’s realistic appearance motivates Luke to act, research (Tien Tan et al., 2025) has demonstrated that students prefer avatar chatbots that incorporate features of the instructor.

It is logical to conclude that the incorporation into Slabot of visemes that articulate the instructor’s voice (as discussed below) contributed to “the fact that one student’s response in the spring of 2025 reached 1 min and 10 s [, which] indicates the potential for Slabot to perform a pioneering function for an avatar chatbot, namely, to elicit ACTFL ratable speech samples” (Kaplan, 2026). In the initial experiment in the spring of 2025 in Spanish 331 (Introduction to Hispanic Culture), only 5 students interacted with Slabot. However, as speculated previously (Kaplan, 2026), a larger sample might result in responses that “exceed 1 min and 10 s and reach 1 min, 30s, or even two minutes” (Kaplan, 2026). This possibility inspired the formulation of the parameters for the present study:

“

During the fall of 2025, the objective will be to determine whether more accurate indications of ratable ACTFL speech samples might be produced after answering five questions. Rather than being an extra-credit assignment, interaction with Slabot will be a required activity in the fall of 2025 in another course in which students view *El laberinto del fauno*, in-person Spanish 434 (Hispanic Culture Through Film). Spanish 434, also taught entirely in Spanish [like Spanish 331], is an upper-level in-person course typically enrolling 20–25 students that is usually taught twice per week (Tuesday and Thursday), as two 75-min classes during a 16-week semester (Kaplan, 2026, p. 12-13).

Researchers are only beginning to understand the impact of linking the design of avatar chatbots to context rather than creating them randomly or generically, as in the cases of ACTFL’s Ava and other commercial platforms such as Duolingo. The Slabot exercise described above, conducted at the University of Tennessee in Spanish 434 in the fall of 2025, produced empirical evidence that the design of an avatar chatbot can positively impact the development of L2 skills.

3 Materials and methods

This study continues a collaborative project that began in the spring of 2025 at the University of Tennessee (Knoxville, TN, USA). The collaborative team consisted of Dr. Gregory B. Kaplan as faculty leader, and a technical production team lead by Dr. Jason Johnston (Executive Director of Online Learning), and that was comprised of Naomi Breeden (Executive Director of Solutions), Michael Eilers (Graphic Designer), Chris Emberton (Assistant Director of Interactive Learning Technologies), Jonathan Fuqua (Web Application Developer), and Dani Powers (Graphic Designer).

The creation of Slabot by the collaborative team is described in a previous study (Kaplan, 2026). The physical appearance of Slabot, as portrayed in Figure 1, combines human and animal features, in the spirit of fauno (one of the principal characters, as portrayed in Figure 2) in Guillermo del Toro’s feature-length movie *El laberinto del fauno* (*Pan’s Labyrinth*) (Toro, 2006).



Figure 1. Slabot.



Figure 2. The character “fauno” from the film *El laberinto del fauno*.

As discussed previously (Kaplan, 2026), Slabot was envisioned as an avatar chatbot that could benefit students by providing an opportunity to practice oral skills and, potentially, instructors by providing them with sufficient material for an ACTFL evaluation. The fact that students interacted with Slabot in the fall of 2025 is a confirmation that the first objective was achieved. Indeed, in a preliminary description of the exercise, students learned that this was the only objective, and they were not informed that material for an ACTFL rating was also being sought. All students who interacted with Slabot were either majors or minors in Hispanic Studies, and enrolled in upper-level (300, 400) courses, and as such had completed all course requirements at the beginning (100) and intermediate (200) levels (which are available at: <https://wlc.utk.edu/spanish/>). ACTFL criteria are typically used to evaluate the oral skills of upper-level students with a major or minor in Hispanic Studies at the University of Tennessee.

An ACTFL evaluation is assigned after an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) which requires a “ratable speech sample” (ACTFL OPI Examinee Handbook 2024, p. 4). The ACTFL ratable speech sample is obtained during a 15 to 30-minute in-person interview. The ACTFL interview can also be conducted virtually for 20 to 40 minutes, a process known as the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview-Computer (ACTFL OPIc). The ACTFL OPIc is performed by an avatar chatbot, called Ava, whose physical appearance varies according to the language being tested, as illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Sample images of the ACTFL OPIC avatar chatbot *ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview-Computer* 2024, p. 5.

As described by Language Testing International, which is responsible for selecting the physical appearance of Ava:

“Ava is an avatar figure that personifies the OPIC interviewer. Test takers listen to her questions and respond to her. Having the picture of Ava on the screen helps to engage the test takers in conversation and mimics a one-on-one conversation with a native speaker of the target language. (*Examination Evaluation*, 2015, pp. 17–18)

The individual responsible for assessing the results of an OPIC assigns a rating based on a speaker’s performance across the criteria of three areas (Global tasks and functions, Accuracy, and Text type) in one of four proficiency levels (Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice):

“Superior
Global tasks and functions: Support opinions, hypothesize, and deal with topics abstractly.
Accuracy: Errors virtually never interfere with communication or distract the native speaker from the message.
Text type: Extended Discourse.

Advanced
Global tasks and functions: Narrate and describe in major time frames and deal effectively with an unanticipated complication.
Accuracy: Understood without difficulty by speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-native speakers.
Text type: Paragraphs.

Intermediate
Global tasks and functions: Create with language, initiate, maintain, and bring to a close simple conversations by asking and responding to simple questions.
Accuracy: Understood with some repetition by speakers accustomed to dealing with non-native speakers.
Text type: Sentences.

Novice
Global tasks and functions: Communicate minimally with formulaic and rote utterances, lists and phrases.
Accuracy: May be difficult to understand, even for speakers accustomed to dealing with non-native speakers.
Text type: Individual words and phrases. (*Examination Evaluation*, 2015, p. 6)

While the OPIC criteria and proficiency levels are widely accepted for assessment, “[h]aving the picture of Ava on the screen ... to engage the test takers in conversation” is not the most effective method according to current research, which establishes that “emotional expressiveness” and “naturalness of movement” have “a positive effect on user engagement” (Zhang and Wu, 2024). Although the Ava avatar chatbot moves its mouth as it speaks, as a standardized tool intended for international use, Ava lacks the type of custom features instilled in Slabot, which is a model for a design that can be tailored to any university course that requires students to speak. To demonstrate the importance of incorporating such features into the design of avatar chatbots, Slabot was modeled on a fictional character familiar to the five students who participated in a pilot project at the University of Tennessee in April 2025. Like Ava, Slabot was endowed with visemes, or visual facial representations of phonemes (the sounds of basic units of speech). In other words, a viseme refers to the mouth shape and facial expression that correspond to a particular sound or word when animating an avatar chatbot. An avatar endowed with visemes is more life-like, and thus more likely to produce more optimal results.

4 Results

As its course description in the University of Tennessee Undergraduate Catalog reveals, the content of Spanish 434, which is taught entirely in Spanish, varies from one instructor to another (University of Tennessee Undergraduate Catalog, 2025):

“Analysis of selected films on subjects concerning life, culture, and artistic traditions in the Hispanic world; exploration of ideological, philosophical social, and political implications of films and a comparison of them with treatments of related subjects in other types of artistic production.

The fall 2025 offering of Spanish 434 focused on the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and Francisco Franco’s dictatorship from 1939 until 1975. Students read several literary texts in Spanish that center on these topics and then viewed their cinematic adaptations, including Guillermo del Toro’s screenplay for *El laberinto del fauno* (Toro, 2005), which takes place in 1944, during the early years of Franco’s dictatorship. After reading the screenplay, students viewed the film (Toro, 2006) and then interacted with Slabot.

19 students interacted with Slabot to complete the required assignment, which counted for seven percent of the final grade. As suggested previously (Kaplan, 2026), the “fact that students will be required to interact with Slabot in Spanish 434 might add some length to their responses,” rather than interact during an extra-credit assignment, as had occurred in Spanish 331 in the spring of 2025.

This speculation was borne out by the results obtained in the fall of 2025. The students received the following instructions to complete the required assignment:

“

El experimento (la tarea obligatoria) consiste en responder a siete preguntas de un avatar sobre la película *El laberinto del fauno* y la vida de Miguel Muñoz. Tu interacción con el avatar y tu respuesta serán grabadas, y tú y el profesor tendrán acceso a esta grabación. Mientras estés grabando tu respuesta, no se te permitirá utilizar AI, notas escritas ni leer ningún texto.

Instrucciones para responder a las siete preguntas:

1. Presiona “Reproducir.”
2. Escucha la pregunta.
3. Elige “Insertar.”
4. Selecciona “Multimedia.”
5. Selecciona “Cargar/grabar contenido multimedia.”
6. Presiona “Record” y graba una respuesta en español con todos los detalles que puedas recordar. (Es posible que aparezca una ventana emergente [pop-up] y debes permitir el acceso al micrófono y la cámara).
7. Cuando termines tu respuesta, presiona “Finished.”
8. Presiona “Save media.” Solo tendrás un intento.

The experiment (the required assignment) consists of answering seven questions from an avatar about the film *Pan's Labyrinth* and the life of Miguel Muñoz. Your interaction with the avatar and your response will be recorded, and you and the professor will have access to this recording. While recording your response, you are not allowed to use AI, take written notes, or read any text.

Instructions for answering the seven questions:

1. Press “Play.”
2. Listen to the question.
3. Choose “Insert.”
4. Select “Media.”
5. Select “Upload/Record Media.”
6. Press “Record” and record a response in Spanish with as many details as you can remember. (A pop-up window may appear, and you may need to allow access to your microphone and camera.)
7. When you have finished your response, press “Finished.”
8. Press “Save Media.” You will only have one attempt.

Slabot asked each student seven questions. The first five questions were designed “to inspire students to progress through levels of profundity in their responses, from repetitive details to speculative discourse” (Kaplan, 2026). When creating the questions attention was also paid to the ACTFL guidelines for assigning a rating, which is

determined by an “individual’s ability to use the language in all types of situations, with regard to topics that may or may not be familiar and in contexts that may or may not have been encountered previously” (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2024, p. 6). In this spirit, the first five questions required students to provide information on the film they had recently watched:

“

Primera pregunta: En la película, el papel del fauno es guiar a Ofelia en sus tres tareas. ¿Cuáles son esas tareas?

First question: In the movie, Pan’s role is to guide Ofelia in her three tasks. What are those three tasks?

Segunda pregunta: El director de la película, Guillermo del Toro, mezcla un mundo real con otro imaginario, ¿qué tienen en común ambos mundos?

Second question: The director of the film, Guillermo del Toro, mixes a real world with an imaginary one: what do the two worlds have in common?

Tercera pregunta: ¿Cuáles son algunas características del capitán Vidal?

Third question: What are some of the characteristics of Captain Vidal?

Cuarta pregunta: ¿Cómo trata el capitán Vidal a Ofelia?

Fourth question: How does Captain Vidal treat Ofelia?

Quinta pregunta: En tu opinión, ¿cuál es la moraleja de la película?

Fifth question: In your opinion, what is the moral of the film?

The final two questions asked by Slabot placed students in a context that they had not “encountered previously” by asking them to speculate about a video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-j-G2GiE6I> [accessed on 25 April 2026]) in which an individual who experienced the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship firsthand, Miguel Muñoz (b. 1925, d. 2022), is interviewed and asked to explain some of the hardships that he endured during his lifetime:

“

Sexta pregunta: *El laberinto del fauno* tiene lugar en 1944. En unos días verás un vídeo sobre Miguel Muñoz, un hombre que vivió en España durante los años 40. ¿Qué crees que Miguel dirá sobre cómo era su vida entonces?

Sixth question: *El laberinto del fauno* takes place in 1944. In a few days, you’ll see a video about Miguel Muñoz, a man who lived in Spain during the 1940s. What do you think Miguel will say about what his life was like back then?

Séptima pregunta: Miguel Muñoz nació en 1925. ¿Qué le dirías a Miguel sobre cómo su vida podría verse afectada por los acontecimientos mundiales-políticos, sociales, económicos o militares-entre 1925 y 1945?

Seventh question: Miguel Muñoz was born in 1925. What would you tell Miguel about how his life might be affected by world events-political, social, economic, or military-between 1925 and 1945?

The aggregated results for the 19 students who completed the assignment are revealed in the table below. The times are indicated by seconds (e.g., 22) and minutes:seconds (e.g., 1:26), and responses that failed to upload are indicated by “X.” In addition, the lack of a response from one student (number 12) is indicated by a “?”.

Table 1. Aggregated results of student interactions with Slabot in the fall of 2025.

Student number	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7	Total time
1	22	1:26	43	36	36	X	34	4:17
2	1:02	49	33	35	40	28	44	4:51
3	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4	17	42	15	29	36	42	1:03	4:04
5	13	17	27	9	13	11	X	1:30
6	18	17	8	11	12	17	17	1:40
7	1:09	59	51	47	1:12	45	50	6:33
8	22	40	36	39	45	52	1:04	4:58
9	44	1:13	41	42	1:22	1:07	1:12	7:01
10	21	1:15	22	46	2:06	25	1:04	6:19
11	7	25	21	21	23	21	42	2:40
12	3:03	4:31	3:13	4:18	3:22	6:26	?	24:53
13	18	32	23	24	43	28	34	3:22
14	25	21	30	31	27	31	53	3:38
15	19	28	16	19	24	37	47	3:10
16	22	20	24	16	33	29	45	3:09
17	9	36	43	25	25	21	39	3:18
18	35	26	40	37	38	35	27	3:58
19	22	31	45	32	12	34	27	3:23

The reasons these responses were not uploaded were technical and non-technical. Concerning the former, several students performed the exercise while using mobile browsers that are not currently supported by Canvas, the course shell used at the University of Tennessee. Students were advised to interact with Slabot on a desktop or laptop computer and not to use these mobile browsers, including iOS Safari and Firefox, which restricted student 3 from uploading responses to all seven questions, and which restricted two other students, numbers 1 and 5, from uploading responses to questions 6 and 7, respectively. In the case of student 12, the student appears to have simply neglected to upload the seventh response.

As the results of the student interaction with Slabot in the fall of 2025 reveal, response 12 was 24 min 53 s long, which was appropriate for an ACTFL rating, as explained below. The results provided the instructor with a wealth of useful data for assessing and correcting grammatical skills. Moreover, the case of student 7 is interesting insofar as this student participated in the initial Slabot experiment in the spring of 2025. In this experiment (documented in Kaplan, 2026), Slabot only asked the students the first question, and the response of student 7 lasted 33 s. When student 7 was asked the same question in the fall of 2025, the response measured 1 min 9 s. The 36-second increase in response time may have occurred because the student viewed *El laberinto del fauno* twice, which underscores the importance of incorporating topics familiar to students into questions to achieve longer response times.

The response by student 12 is remarkable, not only for the level of detail but also because of its length. As OPI interviewers and language teachers know, it is rare for a student to speak an L2 for 25 minutes. Slabot's ability to elicit a 25-minute response suggests that the value of such an avatar chatbot is enhanced by linking its design to course content. The response by student 12 was the following:

Pregunta 1 (3:03): En *El laberinto del fauno*, um, el fauno le da a Ofelia tres tareas para mostrar si ella es la princesa del mundo mágico. La primera tarea es para entrar, um, un árbol grande y obtener una llave del que es en el estómago de un sapo grande. Y el sapo es, el sapo vivo en el dentro del árbol y, um, Oliv, Ofelia, tiene que entrar del, um, del árbol y, uh, hace que el sapo para salir. (1:00) Y, entonces, ella puede obtener la llave. La segunda tarea es en el salón de hombre pálido, y es, él es un monstruo con, um, ojos en sus manos. Y, Ofil, Ofelia tiene que buscar la llave para abrir una caja y sacar unas dagas. Pero ella haceste un error porque ella, en el durante de ese actividad ella come

dos uvas y esta acción despierta el monstruo y ella corre y puede escapar del hombre pálido. Y la tercera tarea para ella es muy difícil porque (2:00) ella tiene que matar a su hermano, que es un bebé, y es como un sacrificio para un ritual. Y Ofelia no puede hacerse esto, esta tarea porque quiero proteger a su hermano. Y en el final ella muere pero en el mundo mágico ella, ella, uh, es la princesa del mundo mágico, y, um, la acción de protegiendo a su hermano es la cosa que causa a ella convierte en el, en la princesa (3:00) del mundo mágico.

Question 1 (3:03): In *Pan's Labyrinth*, um, the Faun gives Ofelia three tasks to determine whether she is the princess of the magical realm. The first task involves entering-um-a large tree to retrieve a key located inside the stomach of a large toad. The toad lives deep within the tree, and-um-Ofelia must venture inside and coax the toad to come out. (1:00) Only then can she retrieve the key. The second task takes place in the chamber of the Pale Man-a monster with-um-eyes located in his hands. Ofelia must use the key to unlock a box and retrieve several daggers. However, she makes a mistake: during the course of this task, she eats two grapes. This action awakens the monster, forcing her to flee in order to escape the Pale Man. The third task is extremely difficult for her because (2:00) she is required to kill her brother-an infant-as a sacrificial offering for a ritual. Ofelia finds herself unable to carry out this task, as she wishes to protect her brother. Ultimately, she dies; yet, in the magical realm, she is revealed to be the true princess. Indeed, the very act of protecting her brother is what allows her to transform into-and take her rightful place as-the princess (3:00) of the magical realm.

Pregunta 2 (4:31): En la historia, el mundo real y el mundo mágico tiene muchas cosas en común. Um, una cosa es que en dos mundos Ofelia tiene que enfrentarse con muchas problemas y situaciones difíciles. Por ejemplo, en el mundo real su mamá está muy enferma y embara, emberezada, y su salud no es bueno. Y, también, uh, Vidal es una persona, persona muy mal y no tiene un buen energía y tiene mucho odio. Entonces, Ofelia tiene que (1:00), tiene que vivir su vida con todos esos problemas. Y el mundo mágico tiene que hacer tareas muy peligrosas para, um, para, uh, para proveer, para probar su, su, um, lo siento. Uh, ella tiene que hacer la tarea para probar si es, él, ella es una persona buena y, y es un buen princesa para el mundo mágico. Y la segunda cosa en común es que las dos, los dos mundos tienen muy reglas, muchas reglas (2:00) y, um, eso es, es un ejemplo en su vida real es que Vidal tiene muchas reglas que son muy estrictas para, um,

Ofelia y su mamá seguir. Y, um, se enojarse co, como los dos mujeres no siguen las reglas. Y también el fauno tiene, tiene reglas estrictas para que ella necesita seguir. Y un ejemplo de las reglas es, son, es las tres tareas. Y el tercero, uh, cosa en común es, um, los dos mundos (3:00) son muy peligrosos. Um, por ejemplo, en la vida real en ese momento en historia real hay una guerra y no es una situación de viviendo muy segura. Y todos los días tienen que sacrificar su sien, sentimiento de una vida muy cómodo porque la guerra es un evento muy tenso. Y también hay mucha violencia. Y también en el mundo mágico hay monstruos que son muy (4:00) peligrosos que pueden, uh, matar a Ofelia, como, uh, el hombre pálido. Y esos, esos, uh, monstruos, mostrar que en, que la situación de ella, ella no puede escapar de las eventos males en su vida.

Question 2 (4:31): In the story, the real world and the magical world share many things in common. For one thing, in both worlds, Ofelia has to face numerous problems and difficult situations. For example, in the real world, her mother is very ill-and pregnant-and her health is poor. Furthermore, Vidal is a truly wicked individual; he radiates bad energy and is filled with hatred. Consequently, Ofelia is forced (1:00) to live her life amidst all these difficulties. In the magical world, she must undertake very dangerous tasks to-well, to prove herself. She has to complete these tasks to demonstrate that she is a good person and a worthy princess for the magical realm. The second thing the two worlds have in common is that they both possess a great many rules. (2:00) An example of this in her real life is that Vidal imposes numerous rules-which are extremely strict-that Ofelia and her mother are expected to follow. He becomes furious whenever the two women fail to abide by these rules. Similarly, the Faun has strict rules that she is required to obey. A prime example of these rules is the set of three tasks she must complete. The third thing the two worlds have in common (3:00) is that they are both extremely dangerous. For instance, in her real life-set against the backdrop of actual history-there is a war going on, making for a very unsafe living environment. Every day, they are forced to sacrifice their sense of comfort and security, as the war creates a constant atmosphere of tension. There is also a great deal of violence. Likewise, in the magical world, there are monsters-such as the Pale Man-that are highly (4:00) dangerous and capable of killing Ofelia. These monsters serve to illustrate that, given her circumstances, she cannot escape the malevolent forces at work in her life.

Pregunta 3 (3:13): El capitán Vidal tiene muchas características males, uh, por ejemplo, él es un, tiene, tiene un personaje muy fuerte y serio. Y también es muy estricto. Y quiere que todos, uh, están, en su control y quiere que todos los, uh, lo obedece. Y también es una persona autoritaria y hablo la, la manera que él habla es muy dura y es claro que él no tiene, uh, carisma para ninguna persona, uh, no para Ofelia, no para su esposa. (1:00) Y él solo, um, le importa su trabajo y para mantener control y orden. Y otra característica es que él es muy violento y en pel, en la película, um, podemos ver que él, uh, no, él no tiene problema hacerse, hacer nada a ninguna persona para obtener que, que, um, él quiere y, um, no, no tiene problema con usar violencia y tácticos muy, um, males para, (2:00) para, um, para obtener lo que quiere. El es poder o, nin, um, como varies cosas. Y también él es muy orgulloso y le importa su imagen y su apellido y cómo, um, otras personas, uh, ve a él y la imagen otras personas tienen para él. Y, um, eso es por lo que él quiere un hijo no un hija porque, uh, cree que un hijo var, um, va a, um, (3:00) uh, generar mucho odio y, um, buenas cosas para su familia y su nombre.

Question 3 (3:13): Captain Vidal possesses many negative traits; for instance, he has a very strong and serious demeanor. He is also extremely strict. He wants everyone under his control and demands that everyone obey him. Furthermore, he is an authoritarian figure; the way he speaks is very harsh, and it is clear that he holds no affection for

anyone-neither for Ofelia nor for his wife. (1:00) His sole concern is his work-specifically, maintaining control and order. Another characteristic is his extreme violence; throughout the film, we see that he has absolutely no qualms about doing whatever it takes to anyone (2:00) to get what he wants. He has no issue employing violence and highly malicious tactics to achieve his ends-whether that involves power, status, or various other objectives. He is also intensely proud; he cares deeply about his image, his family name, how others perceive him, and the reputation he projects to the world. This is precisely why he desires a son rather than a daughter-because he believes that a male heir will (3:00) bring great honor and prestige to his family and his name.

Pregunta 4 (4:18): Vidal trata a Ofelia muy mal y esta tratamiento mal es desde el principio de la historia. Y él no s, uh, se ve a ella como una niña pero ve a ella co, uh, como una cosa muy molesta. Y, um, cuando ella, uh, llega al primera, uh, no le habla mucho y él no tiene, uh, la intención para ser, um, uh, patético, uh, simpático con ella. Y, um, Ofelia tiene mucha imaginación y, um, (1:00) uh, uh, ella mucha imaginación y cómo, y, uh, Vida, Vidal no entiende a mágico o imaginación. Y, um, él cree que, uh, cosas como eso son tontas. Y por esta razón siempre, uh, le habla con un, um, tono muy frío y, uh, antipático. Y, um, él cree, él no le gusta la idea que no puede controlar a Ofelia porque Ofelia, um, tiene (2:00) imaginar mucho y como transportar a s, a su mismo a un mundo mágico. Y, um, él no le gusta y, um, él muy, eno se, muy, él se enoja mucho cuando Of, um, no tiene control estricto de Ofelia. Y, um, pero, también, por esta razón, uh, él ignora a ella muchos y trata a ella como si no importante. Y, al final, uh, Ofelia se lleva a su hermano para, um, para sacrificar (3:00) pero ella no sacrifica a su hermano. En eso me, momento, Vidal, um, Vidal, uh, sien, se siento mal, y eso es porque la vida de su hijo es en peligro. Entonces, no le importa, no l, no le importa mo, mucho, um, uh, la salud o seguridad de Ofelia. Solamente le importa su bebé. Y eso es esta sentimiento que, esto sentimiento que él siente muestra que, um Ofelia, no es, um, uh, (4:00) una o, una persona muy importante en su vida. Y, um, no le importa su, uh, sus, su personalidad, su seguridad, todos.

Question 4 (4:18): Vidal treats Ofelia very poorly-and this mistreatment begins right from the start of the story. He doesn't view her as a child; instead, he sees her as a mere nuisance. When she first arrives, he barely speaks to her, and he has absolutely no intention of being kind or pleasant toward her. Ofelia possesses a vivid imagination (1:00), which is something Vidal simply cannot comprehend. He believes that such things are foolish. For this reason, he always addresses her in a very cold and hostile tone. He dislikes the idea that he cannot control Ofelia, particularly because she spends so much time (2:00) imagining things and mentally transporting herself into a magical world of her own. He resents this, and he becomes furious whenever he lacks strict control over her. Consequently-and for this very reason-he frequently ignores her and treats her as if she were completely insignificant. In the end, Ofelia takes her baby brother away, ostensibly to sacrifice (3:00) him-though she ultimately does not go through with it. At that moment, Vidal is overcome with distress-specifically because his son's life is in danger. Thus, he cares very little-if at all-about Ofelia's health or safety; his only concern is his baby. This sentiment reveals that Ofelia is not, (4:00) in his eyes, a significant figure in his life. He cares nothing for her personality, her safety, or anything else about her.

Pregunta 5 (3:22): En mi opinión, la moraleja de la película, película es, um, hay muchas situaciones como, um, hacer la cosa correcta es más importante de solamente, um, obedece a órdenes. Y, lo siento, Ofelia vive en una vida muy difícil. Su situaciones, su situación es muy difícil porque ella tiene personas en su vida que, uh, quiere que ella solamente sigue a, uh, lo que dice a ella. Um, el fauno es como eso (1:00) y Vidal también. Pero Ofelia puede, um, pensarse por si misma y es, e eso es

una cosa muy buena. Y, um, ella muestra que puede pien, pensar en si misma cuando ella, um, elige a proteger a su hermano y no sacrifica él, uh, en el ritual. Y, um, es, esta, es, es un momento muy importante en la película y la historia porque muestre, muestra, um, la corazón buena de Ofelia. Y (2:00) una otra moraleja es para, es que, iman, imaginación y la creencia en mágica puede darnos, um, esperanza y fuerza como s, uh, um, s, uh, enfrentamos con situaciones muy difíciles en nuestras vidas. Y en la historia el mundo mágico en, en una manera, uh, permite a Ofelia para sentirse fuerte porque su vida real ella tiene muy, mucha, um, mucha odio de Vidal e, y es (3:00) una negativa muy grande. Entonces, ella lucha con la neguetiva, negue, negatividad, um, con su imaginación y creencia en elementos, uh, un poco de sobrenatural.

Question 5 (3:22): In my opinion, the moral of the movie is-um-that there are many situations where doing the right thing is more important than simply-um-obeying orders. And-I feel for her-Ofelia leads a very difficult life. Her situation is extremely tough because she has people in her life who-uh-want her to simply follow-uh-whatever they tell her to do. Um, the Faun is like that (1:00), and so is Vidal. But Ofelia is able to-um-think for herself, and that is a very good thing. And-um-she demonstrates that she can think for herself when she-um-chooses to protect her brother rather than sacrificing him-uh-in the ritual. And-um-this is a very important moment in the film and the story because it reveals-um-Ofelia's good heart. And (2:00) another moral is that imagination-and a belief in magic-can give us-um-hope and strength as we-uh-face very difficult situations in our lives. And in the story, the magical world-in a way-allows Ofelia to feel strong, because in her real life, she faces a great deal of-um-hatred from Vidal; it is (3:00) a massive source of negativity. So, she combats this negativity-um-with her imagination and her belief in elements that are-uh-somewhat supernatural.

Pregunta 6 (6:26): Él probablemente, um, describe que su vida es muy, muy difícil en los años 40s. Um, y es un, una época muy difícil para vivir. Y eso es porque la guerra, uh, sucede en y, y, um, y Francisco Franco tiene poder en ese momento en historia. Y, um, esos son elementos muy difíciles de vida en los años 40s. Y la parte que es muy triste es que él, en este momento, uh, fue una, (1:00) um, un niño. No es un adulto. Entonces, um, es esos momentos cambia la manera que probablemente cambia el manera que él, um, ve a mundo. Y probablemente mencionará com, uh, de, um, el hambre y la, la falta de comida porque en esos años, um, tienen que dividir la comida, uh, entre, uh, su familia y otros en el país y, um, la comunidad. Entonces, no hay (2:00) suficiente comida para todos las personas. Y, um, hay, hay muy, uh, e, e, él problem, probablemente también mencionará que, um, tienen que hacer muy cosas en secreta. Por ejemplo, um, cuando, uh, cultiva grano en, uh, si, cuando cultiva el grano, um, necesita que, um, uh, oscuro y hacerse segura de que, um, el gobierno y la comunidad no ve a (3:00) es, esa grano porque, um, porque el gobierno no le gusta, uh, las personas de la comunidad tienen poder o secretos como eso. Y, um, también Miguel probablemente, um, hablará co, uh, sobre el miedo que s, uh, tienen él y su familia y el país, porque, um, la autoridad del gobierno y Francisco Franco, uh, fue muy, uh, fuerte. Y, um, uh, las personas no tienen (4:00) la libertad para hacer, um, como, como, como todos, como quieres no pueden hablar las cosas que quieres, quieren. Y, um, también la ropa y el pelo es, um, son elementos que no tienen control porque si el gobierno, um, da cuenta de que, uh, es una miembro del par, del, uh, republicano, um, uh, el gobierno corta a el pelo de los, las mujeres (5:00) que son partes de rep, republicanos. Y eso es una manera adicionalmente de, um, tienen control de, uh, sus personas y la país. Y también, um, él probablemente dice que, um, hay muy hipocresía porque en realmente, um, uh, uh, en esa situación una persona tienen, uh, pensamientos y ideas para, uh, sobre, um, algunos, uh, temas o eventos. Por, (6:00) uh,

pero no puede expresar a sus sentimientos porque es, es muy peligroso y, um, no se como el gobierno o la autoridades va a, um, reaccionar a esa, esa información.

Question 6 (6:26): He probably-um-describes his life in the 1940s as being very, very difficult. Um, and it was a very difficult era to live through. This was because the war-uh-was taking place, and-um-Francisco Franco held power at that moment in history. And-um-these were very challenging aspects of life in the 1940s. The truly sad part is that, at this time-uh-he was (1:00) just a child. He wasn't an adult. Consequently-um-those moments altered his perspective; they likely changed the way he-um-viewed the world. He will probably mention-uh-the hunger and the scarcity of food, because during those years-um-they had to ration food-uh-among his family, others in the country, and-um-the community. So, there wasn't (2:00) enough food for everyone. And-um-he will likely also mention that-um-they had to do many things in secret. For example- um-when he grew grain-uh-when he cultivated crops-um-he needed to-uh-wait until dark and ensure that-um-the government and the community didn't see (3:00) that grain. This was because-um-the government didn't like it when people in the community possessed power or kept secrets like that. And-um-Miguel will also likely-um-speak about the fear that he, his family, and the entire country experienced, because-um-the authority of the government and Francisco Franco was very-uh-powerful. And-um-people didn't have (4:00) the freedom to act as they pleased; they couldn't speak their minds or say the things they wanted to say. And-um-clothing and hairstyles are also elements over which people have no control; for instance, if the government-um-realizes that a woman is a member of the Republican Party-um-the government cuts the hair of those women (5:00) who are affiliated with the Republicans. And this is yet another way for them to-um-exert control over their citizens and the country. Furthermore-um-one could likely argue that there is a great deal of hypocrisy involved, because, in reality-um-in such a situation, an individual possesses thoughts and ideas regarding-um-certain issues or events. However, (6:00)-um-they cannot express their feelings, because doing so is extremely dangerous; one simply does not know how the government or the authorities will-um-react to such information.

5 Discussion

The response length by student 12 permitted the assignment of an ACTFL rating, which was determined to be at the Advanced level. The student demonstrated this proficiency by narrating in "major time frames" (albeit by using the historical present tense). In addition, the student was understood without difficulty by an instructor used to listening to non-native speakers and demonstrated the ability to develop ideas by using interrelated sentences, that is, paragraphs. The fact that student 12 produced a response that reached an appropriate length for an ACTFL evaluation validated current theories on the design of avatar chatbots and confirmed predictions made during the first stage of the Slabot experiment (Kaplan, 2026).

At the same time, student 12 committed a good number of grammatical errors in Spanish. Several examples of such errors are found, for example, at the beginning of the answer to question 2:

En la historia, el mundo real y el mundo mágico tiene muchas cosas en común. Um, una cosa es que en dos mundos Ofelia tiene que enfrentarse con muchas problemas y situaciones difíciles. Por ejemplo, en el mundo real su mamá está muy enferma y embara, emberezada, y su salud no es bueno.

Grammatical errors:

En la historia, el mundo real y el mundo mágico tiene: use of the incorrect third-person singular indicative verb “tiene” rather than the correct third-person plural indicative verb “tienen”;

Ofelia tiene que enfrentarse con muchas problemas: use of the incorrect feminine adjective “muchas” rather than the correct masculine adjective “muchos”;

su salud no es bueno: use of the incorrect masculine adjective “bueno” rather than the correct feminine adjective “buena.”

Other examples of grammatical errors are found in the first minute of the answer to question 3:

El capitán Vidal tiene muchos características males, uh, por ejemplo, él es un, tiene, tiene un personaje muy fuerte y serio. Y también es muy estricto. Y quiere que todos, uh, están, en su control y quiere que todos los, uh, lo obedece. Y también es una persona autoritaria y hablo la, la manera que él habla es muy dura y es claro que él no tiene, uh, cariña para ninguna persona, uh, no para Ofelia, no para su esposa.

Grammatical errors:

muchos características males: use of the incorrect masculine adjective “muchos” and the non-existent form “males” rather than the correct feminine adjectives “muchas” and “malas” (muchas características malas);

Y quiere que todos, uh, están, en su control y quiere que todos los, uh, lo obedece: use of the incorrect present indicative verb “están” rather than the present subjunctive verb “estén” and use of the incorrect third-person singular present indicative verb “obedece” rather than the third-person plural present subjunctive verb “obedezcan”;

él no tiene, uh, cariña para ninguna persona: use of the non-existent noun “cariña” rather than the correct masculine noun “cariño.”

The appearance of these grammatical errors places student 12 into a sub-category of Advanced proficiency, or Advanced Low proficiency. The rating of “Advanced Low” was confirmed by a colleague at the University of Tennessee who had also received ACTFL training. The results of the second evaluation can be obtained by contacting the author at gkaplan@utk.edu.

Speakers at the Advanced Low level “demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in all major time frames ... in paragraph length discourse. ... [but] with noticeable self-correction and a certain ‘grammatical roughness’ (ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview, 2005). Student 12 engages in self-correction on many occasions, and the grammatical errors described above illustrate grammatical roughness. Examples of self-correction are found in the answers to:

Question 1: es la cosa que causa a ella convierte en el, en la princesa del mundo mágico; incorrect masculine definite article “el” replaced by the correct feminine definite article “la”;

Question 4: no le habla mucho y él no tiene, uh, la intención para ser, um, uh, patic, uh, simpático con ella; non-existent adjective “patic” replaced by the correct form “simpático”;

Question 5: es un momento muy importante en la película y la historia porque muestre, muestra; incorrect third-person singular subjunctive verb “muestre” replaced by the correct third-person singular indicative verb “muestra”;

Question 6: Y la parte que es muy triste es que él, en este momento, uh, fue una, um, un niño; incorrect feminine indefinite article “una” replaced by the correct masculine indefinite article “un.”

6 Conclusions

The present study demonstrates the effectiveness of an avatar chatbot designed to complement course content. It is instructive to underscore the fact that Slabot was not created generically, as in the ACTFL OPIc and other commercial platforms, but was the product of attention paid to linking the physical form of the avatar chatbot to a context familiar to students who interacted with it. In the fall of 2025, this design enabled students to practice their Spanish in familiar and unfamiliar situations, which, as underscored above, was one of the reasons that Slabot was created. In this light, it is interesting to speculate that more students might have submitted responses appropriate for ACTFL evaluation if they had been informed that this was an objective of the exercise. At the same time, as projected previously (Kaplan, 2026), Slabot was able to elicit a student response in the fall of 2025 that was evaluated according to ACTFL criteria, which speaks to the importance of tailoring an avatar chatbot to encourage optimal results.

Moreover, the level of detail provided by student 12 facilitated the assignment of an ACTFL rating of Advanced Low. This highlights the importance of establishing thematic parameters for an interview that an interviewer can monitor (such as whether all students in a course have seen a film on which an interview is based), rather than offering instructions whose completion is difficult to monitor, such as “[r]eading or listen[ing] to the news for the weeks leading up to taking the OPI or OPIc” (*Tips for OPI and OPIc*, 2026). It is instructive to return at this point to the analogy between an effective avatar chatbot and the success of the image of Princess Leia projected by R2D2 in motivating a novice, Luke Skywalker, to achieve “Superior proficiency” and help rescue the galaxy from the Dark Side. The goal of the Slabot experiment is not as lofty, though its universal appeal lies in its adaptability to any L2 course.

Of course, while the sample of 19 students considered here is appropriate for an exploratory classroom-based study, the results are not meant to be generalized beyond this sample without further testing. In Slabot’s case, the final stage of the experiment took place in the spring of 2026, when the same assignment described in the present study was implemented in Spanish 331. This was the first time that the Slabot assignment was required at the 300-level at the University of Tennessee, and the results collected from 47 students interacting with Slabot will form the basis of a future study.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

b.	born
d.	died
min	minutes
s	seconds

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Profiling Egyptian Divorced Women's Information Needs and Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

Everyone recognizes the value of information and the significance it represents in various aspects of life, particularly for marginalized or vulnerable groups in special circumstances, such as widowed and divorced women. The current study was conducted to fill a gap left by a lack of adequate research on the informational behavior, search patterns, and needs of Egyptian divorced women. Using a qualitative, exploratory approach guided by grounded theory, data was gathered in December 2024 through focus group interviews with 45 divorced women across different administrative regions in Egypt: North Egypt (Alexandria), Middle Egypt (Cairo), and Upper Egypt (Qena). The findings indicate that the average age of respondents ranged from 40 to 50 years, with a medium to high level of education (51.1% holding a BA degree), and an average monthly income between 1,000 and 2,500 EGP. While 71.1% of the participants successfully identified their information needs, their requirements varied considerably, focusing heavily on health care (73.3%), childrearing/education (53.3%), legal/custody rights, and securing suitable employment (48.9%). To satisfy these needs, the vast majority (84.4%) actively utilized various sources and channels, strongly preferring undocumented oral sources (family, relatives, friends, and peers) via face-to-face...

Index Terms: Divorced women • Egypt • Grounded theory • Information barriers • Information needs • Information-seeking behaviour • Qualitative research

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CONFLICTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AI USAGE

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FULL ABSTRACT

Everyone recognizes the value of information and the significance it represents in various aspects of life, particularly for marginalized or vulnerable groups in special circumstances, such as widowed and divorced women. The current study was conducted to fill a gap left by a lack of adequate research on the informational behavior, search patterns, and needs of Egyptian divorced women. Using a qualitative, exploratory approach guided by grounded theory, data was gathered in December 2024 through focus group interviews with 45 divorced women across different administrative regions in Egypt: North Egypt (Alexandria), Middle Egypt (Cairo), and Upper Egypt (Qena). The findings indicate that the average age of respondents ranged from 40 to 50 years, with a medium to high level of education (51.1% holding a BA degree), and an average monthly income between 1,000 and 2,500 EGP. While 71.1% of the participants successfully identified their information needs, their requirements varied considerably, focusing heavily on health care (73.3%), childrearing/education (53.3%), legal/custody rights, and securing suitable employment (48.9%). To satisfy these needs, the vast majority (84.4%) actively utilized various sources and channels, strongly preferring undocumented oral sources (family, relatives, friends, and peers) via face-to-face communication, mobile phones, or social media platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube), while public, school, and mosque libraries were underutilized. Major barriers to information access included financial and time constraints, lack of digital research skills, computer illiteracy, physical and emotional fatigue, and the persisting social stigma associated with divorce in conservative Egyptian society. This study provides critical insights for policymakers, advocates, and civil society organizations to design targeted information support systems and empowerment programs for divorced women in Egypt.

ARCHIVAL RECORD

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Profiling Egyptian Divorced Women's Information Needs and Behaviour

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Abstract

Everyone recognizes the value of information and the significance it represents in various aspects of life, particularly for marginalized or vulnerable groups in special circumstances, such as widowed and divorced women. The current study was conducted to fill a gap left by a lack of adequate research on the informational behavior, search patterns, and needs of Egyptian divorced women. Using a qualitative, exploratory approach guided by grounded theory, data was gathered in December 2024 through focus group interviews with 45 divorced women across different administrative regions in Egypt: North Egypt (Alexandria), Middle Egypt (Cairo), and Upper Egypt (Qena). The findings indicate that the average age of respondents ranged from 40 to 50 years, with a medium to high level of education (51.1% holding a BA degree), and an average monthly income between 1,000 and 2,500 EGP. While 71.1% of the participants successfully identified their information needs, their requirements varied considerably, focusing heavily on health care (73.3%), childrearing/education (53.3%), legal/custody rights, and securing suitable employment (48.9%). To satisfy these needs, the vast majority (84.4%) actively utilized various sources and channels, strongly preferring undocumented oral sources (family, relatives, friends, and peers) via face-to-face communication, mobile phones, or social media platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube), while public, school, and mosque libraries were underutilized. Major barriers to information access included financial and time constraints, lack of digital research skills, computer illiteracy, physical and emotional fatigue, and the persisting social stigma associated with divorce in conservative Egyptian society. This study provides critical insights for policymakers, advocates, and civil society organizations to design targeted information support systems and empowerment programs for divorced women in Egypt.

Keywords: Divorced women, Egypt, Grounded theory, Information barriers, Information needs, Information-seeking behaviour, Qualitative research

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1 Introduction

Regardless of their beliefs, attitudes, jobs, or living conditions, everyone in this world recognises the value of information and the significance it represents in various aspects of life. Everyone requires information, including those dealing with unusual circumstances and situations, such as widowed and divorced women. Everyone should have access to information so that they can better understand and manage their lives. People can become more aware of various life issues and more involved in their societies as they gain access to information (Mansour, 2017). The right to understand and exist is fundamentally connected to the right to access and utilize information for any purpose. Informed people can substantially enhance the quality of their lives and their communities (Ranawera, 2008). Unfortunately, many studies on various groups of information users in society have been conducted, but few of them on those who are in special situations and situations, such as divorced women and widows, have received insufficient attention, particularly from library and informatics professionals and specialists. Reasonable care and attention should be paid in assessing and understanding these groups' information needs.

The current study was conducted to fill a gap left by a lack of adequate studies on the informational behaviour and search for various sources of information by Egyptian divorced women, as well as to assess their information needs. In comparison to other topics discussed in other fields of science in general and in the field of library and

information sciences in particular, this study is considered novel in terms of the category chosen for the study, which has not been successful in identifying it, especially from an information standpoint, especially since they are a category, like any of the community groups representing a societal interest and a measure of importance. According to Mansour (2017), this category has received no research interest from researchers in the field of libraries and information at any level, whether governmental or academic. The study intends to investigate the needs of Egyptian divorced women in terms of their perspectives, motivations, attitudes, habits, and preferences, as well as the challenges they may face. Any findings from this study may raise awareness of the various circumstances and needs of divorced women, particularly their information needs, among advocates, policymakers, and civil society stakeholders interested in women's issues in general and divorced women in particular.

2 The purpose and significance of the study

The purpose of this study is to identify the information needs and information-seeking behaviours of divorced Egyptian women. Despite the small sample size, this qualitative study is the first of its type at the local and regional levels to examine the information needs of Egyptian divorced women, as well as their behaviour in using this information, as well as how they use this information and the factors that affect them. The researcher is curious about this group of information seekers/users

because he wants to shed light on people who are going through difficult times, such as divorce. Unfortunately, professionals interested in this field have never studied it in terms of understanding and assessing their information needs, as well as studying their information behaviour.

2.1 Study objectives

Derived from its primary objective, the subsequent research objectives are as follows:

- To identify the information needs of Egyptian divorced women;
- To determine the types of information sources and channels Egyptian divorced women are using;
- To profile the information-seeking behaviour of Egyptian divorced women;
- To identify the barriers, if any, met by Egyptian divorced women while using information.

2.2 Problem statement

Regrettably, experts and practitioners focused on women's concerns, notably divorce, have insufficiently addressed women's need for knowledge and tools to assist them in properly managing this challenge, especially if it is their first experience with it. This research aims to understand and assess the informational needs of women, the behaviours they employ to meet these needs, the challenges they may encounter in addressing this issue, and the resources they can utilise to overcome these obstacles.

2.3 Limitation of the study

This study examines the needs of divorced Egyptian women and the methods used to meet those needs. It focuses exclusively on Egyptian women, excluding those of other nationalities, particularly those experiencing divorce for the first time. Unfortunately, the small sample size may limit the generalizability of the study's findings, especially given the unique social circumstances of Egyptian society in general and Egyptian women in particular.

3 Definition of terms

3.1 Divorce

Divorce (also known as dissolution of marriage) is the process of terminating a marriage (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018).

3.2 Information Needs

The concept of information needs is frequently perceived as originating from an indistinct awareness of utilized resources and culminating in the discovery of information that yields insights and significance (Kuhlthau, 1993). Hepworth et al. (2002) see this idea as data; information and knowledge that can help people deal with problems and lead to better management of the condition and a better quality of life.

3.3 Information-seeking behaviour (ISB)

According to Boadi and Letsolo (2004), the concept of information seeking is the consequence of a felt information need by a user, who may then make needs upon formal and informal information sources or services to satisfy the needs.

3.4 The Arab Republic of Egypt

Egypt is one of the world's oldest civilizations, with documented history dating back to around 4000 BC. It covers an area of approximately 386,662 square miles and has an estimated population of 107,770,524 (with an annual growth rate of 1.68%) (2022 estimate). Egypt is located in Northeast Africa on the Mediterranean coast, bordered by Libya to the west, Sudan to the south, and the Red Sea to the east (Infoplease, 2025).

4 Literature review

Divorce (also known as annulment) is the process of ending a marriage (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2018). It typically involves the annulment or reorganization of the legal duties and responsibilities of the marriage according to the law of the state or country involved (Federal Arbitration Act (FAA) and the Application of the Doctrine of Separation in Federal Courts (1968)). As Encyclopædia Britannica (2018) notes, divorce laws vary considerably around the world, but in most countries, divorce is a legal process requiring the approval of a court or other competent authority and may involve matters of property distribution, child custody, spousal support, visitation rights, parental care, child support, and debt division. In most countries, monogamy is required by law, so a divorce allows either former spouse to marry another person.

According to Herre et al. (2025), divorce rates vary considerably globally across geographic regions, cultures, and legal systems. While these rates peaked in the 1990s and have generally stabilized or declined in the Western world, regions such as Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and parts of the Americas still see approximately 40% to 50% of marriages end in legal separation. Divorce rates are typically measured as the "crude rate" (divorces per 1,000 people annually) or as the percentage of marriages ending in divorce over time. North Macedonia has the highest crude divorce rate in the world at 9.6 divorces per 1,000 people, followed by Liechtenstein at 4.9 per 1,000. Portugal, Spain, and Luxembourg also exhibit astonishing rates, with analysts suggesting that between 79% and over 90% of marriages ultimately end in divorce, largely driven by trends favoring cohabitation over marriage. The lowest divorce rates in the world are typically found in conservative societies where marriage is closely tied to culture and law. Sri Lanka has the lowest rate globally, at 0.15 divorces per 1,000 people, followed by India, which is known for its low divorce rate, with less than 1% of marriages ending in divorce. Countries like Vietnam and Guatemala also have extremely low rates, around 0.2 divorces per 1,000 people.

5 Divorce in Egypt: an overview

Discrimination in Egypt's divorce system begins long before a woman files for divorce; it begins with the marriage itself. Many women in Egypt are forced into marriage against their will, often before reaching adulthood. While Egyptian marriage contracts may include clauses guaranteeing certain rights and equality in obtaining a divorce, many women are not informed of their right to negotiate these clauses and are often excluded from the negotiation process. Ending her marriage further restricts a woman's autonomy and choices. While men seeking a divorce are not required to go to court, women must navigate a complex, burdensome, costly, and lengthy divorce system to dissolve their marriages. Ultimately, a woman must choose between a protracted divorce based on proving fault, which allows her to retain her financial rights (the authorities can collect spousal and child support), or a divorce based on relinquishing her rights (khul'). (Human Rights Watch, 2024) Divorce in Egypt is governed by the Personal Status Law, which is based primarily on Islamic Sharia and is regulated mainly by Laws No. 1 of 2000, No. 25 of 1920, and No. 25 of 1929, as amended. Divorce cases

are referred to the competent family courts. The two main legal methods for ending a marriage are divorce (initiated by the husband) and *khul'* (initiated by the wife). It should be noted that a woman may also file for divorce based on a fault claim.

The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics reports that Egypt's divorce rate rose by 83% from 1996 to 2017. The rate was 1.2 per 1,000 marriages from 1996 to 1999 and 2.2 per 1,000 marriages in 2015. Annually, roughly 200,000 married couples dissolve their marriages (Reda, 2019). Research indicates that 40% of marriages terminate within the initial five years. In 2017, divorce rates in Egypt varied between 39.3 and 60.7 percent, contingent upon rural or urban settings.

A divorce case is filed in Egypt every four minutes, according to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS). According to official statistics, Egypt has the highest divorce rate in the world, with more than 250 divorces per day. Among the consequences of family separation are the emergence of over 4 million divorced women and 9 million children. According to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics report, the number of divorce cases in the country increased to 18.6 thousand in August 2018, up from 18.1 thousand in the same month of 2017, and there were an additional ten thousand cases of divorce initiated by women in exchange for compensation before family courts in various provinces during the same month.

The economic crises that have affected Egypt and their profound effects on society have resulted in a significant increase in the divorce rate. This has prompted inquiries into the correlation between the divorce phenomenon and the prevailing state of poverty, which has been exacerbated by these crises. The divorce rate in Egypt has increased as a result of poverty, rampant unemployment, inadequate living conditions, elevated prices, and discontent (Ahmed, 2019).

As previously mentioned, there is a lack of definitive literature concerning the population of this study at local, regional, or international levels, rendering this research a pioneering and singular contribution to the field of information-seeking behavior. Although there are several studies concerning divorced women, including the causes and issues related to divorce, no comprehensive study has yet examined these women's informational needs and behaviors. Consequently, no literature pertinent to this subject was identified.

In a recent study, published by the Egyptian Institute for Studies (EIS) on the frightening spread of the divorce phenomenon in Egypt, Ahmed (2019) stated that reactions to this phenomenon ranged from denial to ignorance to dismissal. Members of the National Council for Women underestimated and marginalised the problem, failing to take any action to address it. In light of the contradictory statements, the House of Representatives (Parliament) received several briefing requests to discuss the divorce figures reported in the media. The political leadership also began to discuss the phenomenon and directed the government to take decisive action against it in order to address the alarming ramifications for Egypt's conservative society.

Concerning the role of the social safety net in meeting the needs of divorced women in Saudi society, Al-Najai (2017) attempted to clarify the concept of social welfare, including its forms and stages of development in human society, as well as its characteristics, objectives, functions, relationship to social work, and policies in Saudi society. She also classified human needs and investigated the function of social workers in attaining social security. She also discussed the need for government social safety nets for divorced women. The study found that charity groups' operations have shifted from just providing cash assistance to delivering direct services that foster self-reliance through skill development, education, and training; a phenomenon known as

socioeconomic empowerment. These services include training and rehabilitation programs that help people transition from assistance users to productive members of society, as well as family health care by providing medication and therapy and supporting needy families in securing housing and other essentials.

Duffy (1995) attempted to assess the health-seeking behaviour of divorced women who were single parents, as well as the facilitators and barriers to health behaviour. Data was collected from 148 women with children one year after the divorce using a questionnaire and a phone interview. Women lead healthy lifestyles, according to the findings, with nearly half reporting that their health has improved since their divorce. Education was found to be a significant and positive predictor of overall health behaviour scores. The facilitator and deterrent categories of expected healthy behaviour were the amount of stress, control over time, feelings of physical and mental well-being, personal appearance, material resources, and social support.

From 1996 to 2014, Ortega-Diaz (2020) investigated the relationship between individual poverty and marital status (divorced, separated, in free marriage, or legally married) in Mexico. The study found that women exhibit more signs of poverty compared to men, particularly among divorced individuals. This disparity may stem from legal stipulations that assign assets acquired during marriage to the person who works and receives compensation. Since many women are employed in unpaid sectors, men typically retain ownership of these assets. Ignoring these legal realities can result in poverty and perpetuate gender bias following divorce. Additionally, administrative records of marriage and divorce lack crucial information regarding the backgrounds of husbands and children, as well as their employment status before and after marriage. Consequently, these details must be documented to aid lawmakers and decision-makers in addressing gender bias stemming from rigid laws. Ryan and Thomas (2008) conducted a qualitative study to explore the challenges and opportunities for growth faced by divorced women, gaining insights from personal interviews with ten women from similar backgrounds. These interviews highlighted several themes, including reflections on dating, married life, self-perceptions, levels of support, family dynamics, personal emotions, personal growth, and future aspirations. The findings were organized using Mezirow's (2000) theory of transformational learning to better understand growth during transitional phases.

6 Data analyses

The researcher conducted an analysis of this qualitative study using grounded theory, which is recognised as the most widely used method and is well-suited to the nature of qualitative research. Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a methodology for systematically deriving theory from data gathered through social research (Büscher, 2007). In essence, it is a qualitative approach for examining a specific phenomenon or process and formulating new theories based on real-world data collection and analysis. One of the most notable advantages of employing grounded theory is that the final outcome authentically represents real-world situations. Grounded theory is based directly on insights from real-world participants in natural settings, employing methods such as in-depth interviews and observations, which yield more accurate depictions of reality. In contrast, other research methods often occur in less natural environments, such as research laboratories. The researcher concentrated solely on the essential data for analysis, as the focus should be on the most significant information. Consequently, the analysis was restricted to data closely aligned with the research questions, leading to the exclusion of other information, which could constitute half or more of the total data.

Following the initial analysis, the data was broken down into numerous small encodings, which were then synthesised into a few larger subjects. This synthesis was achieved by grouping similar or convergent encodings into a single category referred to as a “theme” (Figure 1).

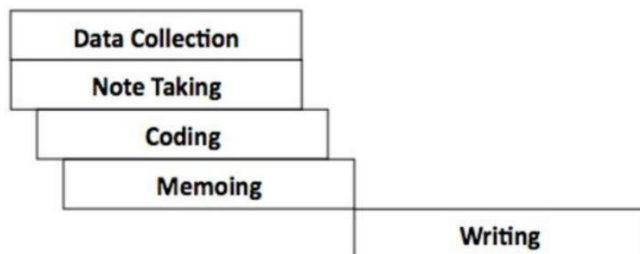


Figure 1. The process of developing a grounded theory

7 Research questions

Based on its objectives, the following questions were decided:

- RQ1. What are the information needs of Egyptian divorced women?
 RQ2. What types of information sources and channels are Egyptian divorced women using?
 RQ3. What is the information-seeking behaviour profile of Egyptian divorced women?
 RQ4. What are the challenges, if any, met by Egyptian divorced women while using information?

8 Research methodology

8.1 Research design

To align with the study topic, a qualitative research methodology (Creswell, 2018; Denzin, 2019) was employed to generate a specific and accurate interpretation of participants' responses. Creswell (2012) and Gay and Mills (2015) emphasize that the purpose of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation at hand. This topic is complex, as is the associated data collection tool. Sampling the population, particularly divorced women in conservative societies like those in the East, especially Arab and Egyptian societies, poses challenges. Establishing direct dialogue with these women can be difficult due to societal stigma and the reluctance of many to disclose their social status, which includes their divorce. Divorced women often become subjects of societal “discussion” and “questioning.” To confront this systemic issue, the researcher sought the assistance of a group of female friends and his daughters-in-law, who had connections with divorced women in Egypt.

8.2 Research technique

Using the snowball approach, the researcher managed to connect with a relatively small number of divorced women. Due to this reliance on a limited sample size, the study may be characterised as exploratory. To encourage participation among divorced women, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, some in-kind assistance was provided. Following an initial introduction of the research team and the study's objectives, the researcher organised four focus groups to interview the participants. According to Morgan (1996), focus groups serve as a valuable tool for exploratory research and can help test preliminary ideas regarding research design. This method has been extensively employed to gauge participants' perceptions in a specific area of study (Chase, 2000). Furthermore, focus groups can uncover many issues that other methods, such as surveys, often struggle to identify accurately. In this

study, focus groups were primarily utilised to enable participants to express their opinions freely about their information use.

8.3 Sampling

Several training sessions were conducted as a result of the low education levels of many participants and the general lack of awareness among the participants. In order to facilitate the research, the principal investigator employed two female research assistants and three female interlocutors. The study included 45 participants. It was conducted without any governmental or regulatory approval, as participation was voluntary, particularly given the participants' ages, which ranged from under 25 to 55 years. Participants were divided into four groups of equal size, as far as possible, according to Egypt's administrative divisions, including two non-contiguous groups in the political capital (Cairo), due to its larger size compared to other Egyptian cities, as shown in Table 1.

Groups	N
Group 1: The North Egypt (Alex.)	13
Group 2: The Middle Egypt (Cairo)	11
Group 3: The Middle Egypt (Cairo)	12
Group 4: Upper Egypt (Qena)	9
Total	45

Table 1. The distribution of respondents' groups

According to Krueger and Casey (2008), the sample size mentioned is appropriate for the study. The number of participants in each group was easily controlled. The interviews took place in December 2024 and lasted between seventy and one hundred minutes. The duration of these sessions, as noted by Gibbs (1997), was reasonable. Additional questions were asked during the personal interviews to clarify any vague responses. The interviews were digitally recorded, and manual notes were also taken.

9 Findings of the study

The personal dialogue questions posed to the participants formed the foundation for the findings of this study. Additionally, the respondents' answers were utilised to address the four questions of the study after being filtered. The findings were then presented alongside the extracts provided by the respondents, which were shared without any distortion or modification that could potentially impact the understanding of the findings. The researcher has only revised these excerpts to ensure consistency with the organisation and language of the study. To avoid repetition of the respondents' extracts, each theme or idea was assigned a distinctive code. This approach was implemented to clarify the beneficiaries' responses to each of the four study questions while preventing any overlap or confusion.

The researcher then categorized the symbols and codes according to their similar content and meanings, while also identifying those with different content. For example, each participant expressed their opinions and reservations on the topic of “information needs of divorced women.” Although these differences were not significant, the variations in the responses were clear. The researcher utilized the established codes to compile these responses for further analysis. The researchers implemented a thematic approach to categorize the data, as per Braun and Clarke (2006).

10 Respondents' demographic characteristics

The average age of respondents fell between 40 and 50 years, as indicated by the demographic profile of the study, which includes factors such as age, education, and income. Generally, respondents reported an average

monthly income ranging from 1,000 to 2,500 EGP, categorized as average to above average, along with a medium to high level of education. Figure 2 shows that the age distribution of respondents spanned from under 25 to over 55 years. The age group of 46 to 50 accounted for just over 25% (26.7%) of the population, while 15.6% were aged 41 to 45, and 13.3% were 55 or older.

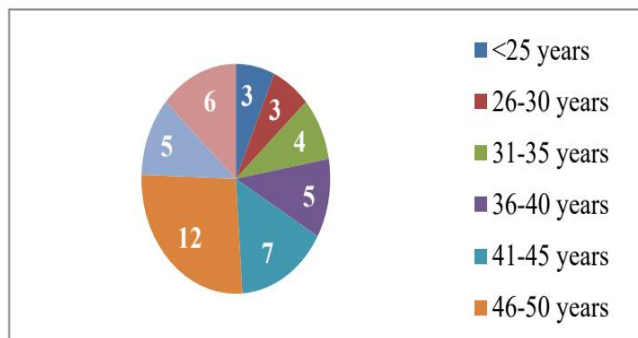


Figure 2. Respondents' age

The study revealed that the majority of respondents (51.1%) possess a BA degree, as illustrated in Figure 3. This is followed by more than one-quarter (26.7%) of them who have completed high school or a diploma, 11.1% who are uneducated, 6.7% who have completed primary school, and 4.4% who have no formal education.

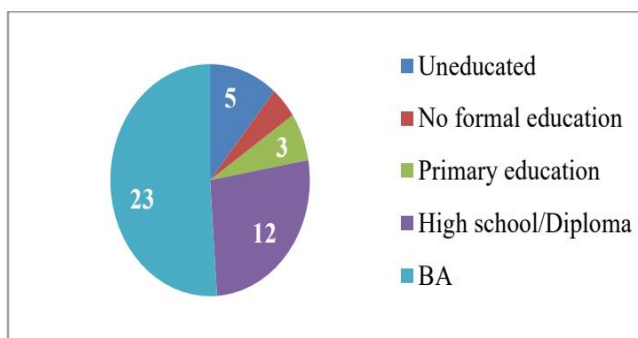


Figure 3. Respondents' education level

According to the study, respondents' monthly income ranged from 1000 to 3500 Egyptian pounds (1 USD = 50.23 EGP, based on the January 25, 2025 exchange rate) (Almasder.com, 2025). One-third of respondents (33.3%) earn less than 1000 to 1500 EGP, slightly more than a quarter (26.7%) earn between 1500 and 2000 EGP, and nearly a quarter (22.2%) earn between 2001 and 2500 EGP (Figure 4).

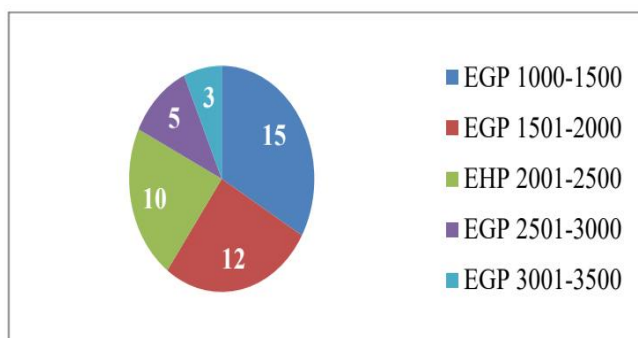


Figure 4. Respondents' monthly income

11 Respondents' assessment of information needs

11.1 RQ1. What are the information needs of Egyptian divorced women?

The results of the study suggest that only slightly more than two-thirds (71.1%) of respondents have successfully identified their information needs, while nearly one-quarter (22.2%) are unaware of how to do so. The results also indicate a substantial degree of variation in the information needs of participants, particularly in the context of personal and family matters. Additionally, more than half (53.3%) of the participants expressed a desire for information that could assist them in managing associated costs, as well as in raising and educating their children and supporting them psychologically, socially, and emotionally. In the same vein, numerous participants identified the pursuit of pertinent information as a means of securing suitable employment, with nearly half (48.9%) expressing a desire for a more advantageous position in order to enhance their financial and economic status. Furthermore, over two-thirds (73.3%) of participants expressed interest in their health information requirements, while over one-third (37.2%) desired to broaden their professional networks. Additionally, nearly 25% (26.7%) expressed a desire to participate in organizations that would assist in the defense of their rights and the mitigation of the social stigma they encounter.

"I am uncertain about how to distinguish or separate my needs from one another, as they overlap".

A divorced woman, aged 46 to 50 years.

"I do not perceive any complications; everything appears to be in order." I do not actively pursue information to resolve my issues. Consequently, I do not believe that I apply it in a formal manner when addressing these matters."

A divorced woman, aged 31 to 35 years.

"While searching for information, I primarily seek to obtain legal rights and custody rights.

" A divorced woman, aged 35 to 40 years.

"I intend to satisfy my information requirements, particularly in terms of establishing social connections, through the utilisation of social media platforms."

A divorced woman, aged 26 to 30 years.

"I require social support." Consequently, I am in search of online meetings, gatherings, seminars, or awareness lectures that are specifically designed for divorced women, in order to connect with others who are in similar circumstances."

A divorced woman, aged 46 to 50 years.

"I am in search of information that will help me establish social networks in order to increase my self-assurance and acquire more experience."

A divorced woman, aged less than 25 years.

"I am in search of job websites to help me locate employment opportunities that will allow me to manage my life and provide for my family, while also alleviating my loneliness."

A divorced woman, aged 26 to 30 years.

"I am inquiring about organizations that provide assistance to divorced women, advocate for their rights, and strive to alleviate the social stigma associated with divorce."

A divorced woman, aged 46 to 50 years.

"I do not have a predetermined strategy for my actions or decisions, and I do not believe it is necessary to calculate my needs using paper and pen."

A divorced woman, aged less than 25 years.

12 Types of information sources and channels use by respondents

12.1 RQ2. What types of information sources and channels are Egyptian divorced women using?

A significant majority (84.4%) of respondents made effective and frequent use of various information sources and channels, according to the study's findings. This was acknowledged, despite the fact that the researcher observed that the illiteracy of a small number of the remaining respondents (11.1%) impeded their ability to utilise these sources. As a result, this affected the methods by which these resources could be accessed. Electronic platforms, social networking sites, and oral communications with others, such as other divorced women, family members, relatives, friends, neighbours, and occasionally coworkers, were among the most significant sources and channels identified. The study also discovered that three types of libraries—namely, the public library, the school library, and the mosque library—were in use, albeit to a limited extent.

"I frequently consult books on Egyptian personal status laws, with a particular emphasis on those that pertain to divorce and the rights of divorced women".

A divorced woman, aged 26 to 30 years.

"I rely on electronic information sources for their convenience, speed, and accessibility from any location at any time".

A divorced woman, aged 26 to 30 years.

"I frequently utilize the Internet to establish connections with individuals and organizations that share my interests, including WhatsApp and Facebook".

A divorced woman, aged 31 to 35 years.

"I engage in newsgroups and email mailing lists (listservs) that concentrate on the rights of divorced women, including WomansDivorce and GoMomGo".

"I utilize online forums to acquire extensive information and enhance my social network"

Two divorced women, aged 31 to 35 years.

"I am in search of websites that concentrate on topics that are pertinent to divorced women, such as the National Council for Women and the Egyptian Fatwa House, which offer authoritative legal opinions and rulings in Islamic law. As a divorced woman, I wish to consult and inquire about my rights".

A divorced woman, aged 41 to 45 years.

"I utilize YouTube videos to locate recreational programs and topics concerning divorced women".

A divorced woman, aged 26 to 30 years.

"Educational seminars focused on women's rights, particularly for divorced and widowed individuals, in conjunction with diverse social activities, have facilitated the expansion of my communication network. I aim to enhance relationships with fellow divorced women, as we possess numerous shared interests and challenges".

A divorced woman, aged 41 to 50 years.

"The public library, which I frequented with my daughter, provided an abundance of resources that enhanced my comprehension of life. I frequently depend on literary and historical texts because of their pertinence to my role as a high school educator".

A divorced woman, aged 36 to 40 years.

"I occasionally visit my son's school library, which provides a diverse array of resources and collections to assist him with his homework and school projects".

A divorced woman, aged 31 to 35 years.

"Despite the mosque library's limited collection, my association with the mosque as a place of worship and prayer has served as an incentive for me to continue utilizing its resources, particularly for the religious knowledge I wish to impart to my young children".

A divorced woman, aged 50 to 55 years.

"I am endeavoring to acquire computer skills in order to assist my children with their homework; however, my work schedule presents a challenge."

A divorced woman, aged 35 to 40 years.

"I am assured in advocating for the utilization of electronic information resources. I acknowledge the necessity to enhance my proficiency in utilizing computers and the Internet".

A divorced woman, aged 36 to 40 years.

13 Respondents' information-seeking behaviour profile

13.1 RQ3. What is the information-seeking behaviour profile of Egyptian divorced women?

The findings revealed the extent to which these divorced women valued the role and significance of information in their lives, as well as the profile of respondents' information-seeking behavior. The primary reason for utilizing this information was to meet basic needs, including food, drink, clothing, and raising children, according to more than three-quarters (82.1%). The study's results indicated that oral sources were the preferred method of information acquisition for nearly all divorced women. In addition, a substantial number of divorced women (91.1%) concurred that the most significant channels for verbal communication were family, relatives, friends, neighbors, and peers, whether through direct interactions or electronic communications via mobile phones or social media platforms such as WhatsApp.

"I acknowledge the critical role that information sources play in assisting me in addressing my needs as a divorcee".

A divorced woman, aged 26 to 30 years.

"My objective is to alleviate the challenges of life by providing information, particularly in the form of entertainment, in addition to assisting me in managing them".

A divorced woman, aged 31 to 35 years.

"I request information regarding fundamental elements of existence, encompassing sustenance, beverages, apparel, education, and health".

A divorced woman, aged 41 to 45 years.

"I utilize information sources spontaneously. My family, relatives, and neighbors serve as my principal sources of information, especially regarding the essentials of life and the upbringing of my three children".

A divorced woman, aged 35 to 40 years.

"Among the most prevalent sources of information and channels that I follow are friends and peers".

A divorced woman, aged 41 to 45 years.

"I favor verbal communication with others to ascertain my informational requirements and disseminate information, both in my personal and professional spheres".

A divorced woman, aged 51 to 55 years.

"Mobile technology, such as mobile phones, has facilitated my communication with my family, friends, colleagues, and family doctor"

A divorced woman, aged 25 to 30 years.

14 Respondents' difficulties in using information

14.1 RQ4. What are the challenges, if any, met by Egyptian divorced women while using information?

Respondents encountered numerous obstacles that hindered their capacity to apply the information they were seeking. A number of individuals struggled with limited research skills, particularly in electronic sources, and some exhibited a lack of enthusiasm during the search process. Furthermore, the access and utilization of a variety of information sources by these divorced women were significantly impacted by financial constraints and time constraints. These obstacles resulted in a reduction in their ability to comprehend or appreciate life, as well as a decreased reliance on information for problem-solving. A general lack of understanding regarding the role and importance of information in decision-making and problem-solving, societal perceptions of divorced women, physical exhaustion, and psychological stress were among the other difficulties.

"I lack the energy and enthusiasm that I consider to be essential for the effective search of a variety of information sources".

A divorced woman, aged 51 to 55 years.

"When I consider and pursue the necessary information, I face a multitude of significant obstacles, including illiteracy, time constraints, and budget constraints".

A divorced woman, aged 51 to 55 years.

"The capacity to capitalize on these sources is significantly impeded by the imposition of stringent restrictions on movement in order to locate information sources".

A divorced woman, aged 46 to 50 years.

"The capacity to search for information is impeded by physical exhaustion and work-related stress".

A divorced woman, aged 35 to 40 years.

"The perception of me as a divorcee and my feelings of frustration influence my utilization of a variety of information sources".

A divorced woman, aged 46 to 50 years.

"I am unable to devote a significant amount of time to the pursuit of information; instead, I distribute it to my friends and colleagues".

A divorced woman, aged 31 to 35 years.

"My age presents a challenge for me in terms of conducting my own research and searching for information fluently".

A divorced woman, aged 51 to 55 years.

15 Discussion

The importance of information in our daily lives is beyond dispute. Due to the significance of knowledge in decision-making and problem-solving, it is imperative that all individuals, particularly those who are confronted with challenging circumstances or challenges, such as divorced women and widows, have access to information. It is imperative to consult sources that can provide this information when the need arises, taking into account the necessity, availability, and capacity of each source. As Case (2007, p. 333) has observed, "An information need is triggered when an individual perceives a problematic situation or information gap, in which their internal knowledge and beliefs, as well as their model of the environment, are unable to provide a path to achieving their objectives".

The objective of this study is to examine the diverse information-seeking behaviors that respondents employ to satisfy their unique informational requirements. This qualitative study is the first of its kind at the local and regional levels to investigate the factors that influence such needs and behaviors, to the best of my knowledge, and based on relevant literature. The researcher's objective is to provide support to individuals in difficult circumstances, particularly those associated with divorce. Therefore, this type of information search is essential. Regrettably, there has been a limited amount of research conducted in this field, as professionals have not been able to adequately identify or assess the information needs of these individuals or analyze their information-seeking behaviors.

Divorce in Egypt is regulated by the Personal Status Law, which is primarily based on Islamic Sharia, and is governed by Laws No. 1 of 2000, No. 25 of 1920, and No. 25 of 1929, as amended, according to Hosny (2021). These laws protect the rights of women, such as deferred dowry (as specified in the marriage contract or verified by witnesses), divorce compensation (approximately equivalent to 24 months' alimony), and maintenance during the waiting period (approximately equivalent to 3 months' alimony). Children are granted the following rights when they are involved: the provision of marital housing or a housing allowance for the children, alimony for the divorced mother (in exchange for child custody), a breastfeeding allowance, child support, medical expenses for the children, educational expenses for the children, and costs for summer and winter clothing for the children.

According to the results of this investigation, the respondents' average age ranged from 40 to 50 years. They had a high to medium level of education, and their average monthly salary was between 1,000 and 2,500 EGP (\$19.90 and \$49.80 as of January 2025). Given that the demographic characteristics of the majority of respondents indicated a "relatively" high level of education, one-third of them exhibited a remarkable capacity to identify their diverse information

requirements. The value and significance of information in their lives were of interest to the majority, with over three-quarters indicating that it was crucial to them to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, and child-rearing. This is consistent with previous research, including that conducted by Orange et al. (2012), which demonstrated a positive correlation between education level and access to information. Almost all divorced women preferred oral sources when seeking information, which are frequently referred to as “informal sources,” verbal sources,” or “non-documented.” Numerous divorced women concurred that the most significant verbal communication channels were family, relatives, friends, neighbors, and peers, whether through direct interactions or electronic communications via mobile phones and social networking sites such as WhatsApp/WhatsApp. Oral communication enables individuals to express their narratives in their own words and voices, which reflects their comprehension. Social contacts and tradition are more conducive to this form of communication than other systems, such as libraries, as per Mohammed’s (2019) research. Several respondents expressed a lack of interest in utilizing libraries for the purpose of acquiring knowledge. The information requirements of Egyptian divorced women were found to be highly variable in this study, particularly in relation to their personal and familial requirements. More than half of the respondents expressed a desire for information to help them in the process of raising and educating their children. Furthermore, a significant number of respondents pursued pertinent information in order to identify suitable employment opportunities. Nearly half of the respondents expressed a desire for careers that would enable them to fulfill their life obligations or participate in social activities and self-actualization. Additionally, over two-thirds of respondents expressed a desire to pursue specialized health care, indicating that health knowledge is a critical information requirement.

The emphasis placed on specific needs by divorced Egyptian women is a result of their perception of the limited access to resources that are typically available to pregnant women. The World Health Organization (WHO) released a substantial study on November 9, 2006, that focused on the health needs and contributions of women. This research underscores the critical role of women in society and emphasizes the health requirements of women. It indicates that prejudice frequently induces feelings of disappointment in women regarding their communities and healthcare systems. Women are more vulnerable to poverty, limited job opportunities, part-time work, or informal sector jobs that lack health coverage, and they bear a greater financial burden than men due to their higher healthcare needs. The objectives of the analysis are to enhance the health outcomes of women by eliminating financial obstacles that obstruct their access to healthcare. Additionally, more than one-third of the respondents who participated in the survey expressed a desire to broaden their social circles and acquaintances. Many respondents frequently and effectively employed a diverse array of information sources and channels. The most significant of these were personal exchanges with others, including fellow divorced women, family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers, as well as electronic and social networking sites. Additionally, respondents utilized three types of libraries: public, school, and mosque libraries, although to a lesser extent. The study participants encountered a variety of obstacles during their search for information, which impeded their capacity to apply this knowledge. A lack of interest in the research process, limited familiarity with information search skills (particularly in relation to electronic sources), and financial and time constraints were among the most significant obstacles that divorced women encountered when utilizing information. Many divorced women encounter obstacles that reduce their ability to rely on knowledge for problem-solving, life comprehension, or even enjoyment. A lack of awareness regarding the

role and importance of information in decision-making, societal stigma surrounding divorced women, physical exhaustion, and psychological stress are additional obstacles. Razak et al. (2024) underscored the fact that the behavior of divorced women is significantly influenced by social and cultural stigmas in this context. In numerous traditional or patriarchal societies, divorced women are at risk of social condemnation, which necessitates them to be extremely cautious when gathering information in order to prevent social shame. Divorced women face a variety of obstacles and challenges, such as social, familial, financial, emotional, and psychological issues, as per Rath and Pachauri (2018). Research has demonstrated that divorced women who have strong family support encounter fewer challenges than those who do not. Mansour’s research (2015 and 2017) identified time constraints, lack of awareness and education, illiteracy, and financial hardship as the most significant barriers faced by domestic workers and beggars in Egypt when seeking information. These findings are consistent with these findings.

16 Conclusions and recommendations for further research

This is a rare study, possibly the sole one, that investigates the information-seeking behavior of Egyptian divorced women. This is the inaugural publication of its kind to systematically address this population at the local and regional levels. This is supported by the limited literature identified in the investigation. This study systematically aims to identify the characteristics, needs, and behaviors related to information within this group, as well as the factors influencing its trends and the obstacles hindering the utilization of various information sources for evaluation, ultimately resulting in recommendations for enhancing comprehension and surmounting these barriers. This study determined that the demographics of Egyptian divorced women were diverse. Their average age ranged from 40 to 50 years, they possessed a high to medium level of education, and their monthly income varied between 1,000 and 2,500 Egyptian Pounds (EGP). A significant percentage of divorced women in Egypt reported a lack of awareness regarding their information rights, and most were unable to manage their information appropriately. The study revealed considerable diversity in the informational requirements of divorced women, particularly regarding individual and familial needs, work-related activities, and the pursuit of improved employment opportunities. A significant number of divorced women preferred undocumented oral sources and frequently utilized informal channels of communication with relatives, peers, and employers, whether through direct interaction, face-to-face meetings, or mobile and social media platforms. Divorced women seek knowledge primarily to aid in responsibilities pertinent to their profession. A significant percentage of divorced women preferred oral or informal sources, such as interactions with peers, family, and friends, over written ones. Besides being a crucial resource, divorced women significantly depended on their accumulated experience. The primary issues included time constraints, illiteracy, psychological pressure, a detrimental social image, ignorance of fundamental rights — particularly information rights — insufficient financial resources, inadequate skills and training, and financial obligations. Divorced women constitute a demographic of information seekers/users who have not received adequate research attention, both from pertinent governmental bodies and from scholars focusing on this category of information users. This group of information seekers necessitates comprehensive research. According to the study’s findings and the current literature, further research is necessary to understand how respondents perceive, utilize, and evaluate information. Further research is required to examine the impact of barriers on the information utilization of these seekers. The study’s findings indicate that numerous respondents did not adequately engage with any form of

library utilization. Consequently, further investigation is necessary to ascertain the reasons for their hesitance to utilize libraries in their quest for information. This study aligned with Mansour (2017) in advocating for the formulation of appropriate strategies for utilizing traditional and widely used information dissemination channels, including cultural performances and group discussions. Cognitive assistance entities should be developed to optimize the role of information in the lives of divorced individuals and promote their utilization. Undoubtedly, such support aids them in identifying and evaluating their cognitive requirements while fostering a more profound comprehension of life's diverse challenges. This would also enhance their recognition of the contributions they make to their communities. To effectively manage a demographic and understand their genuine needs, it is imperative to possess current, reliable data and statistics concerning Egyptian divorce. It is recommended that some respondents' understanding of their information use be bolstered through effective educational and cultural programmes that help them appreciate the importance of information in their lives. Ahmed (2019) asserts that the Egyptian Ministry of Social Solidarity ought to furnish prompt support to divorced women by disseminating specialized booklets addressing familial issues and solutions for married couples within government agencies, centers, hospitals, and other institutions. Moldovan (2014) asserts that divorce is a critical societal issue that requires global public awareness to mitigate its underlying causes. Precise and up-to-date information concerning this event is imperative. Likewise, sufficient information is essential to understand the divorced community and assess their informational requirements with discernment and integrity.

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Medieval Literature as Provocation, Challenge, and Discourse: The Erotic, the Philosophical, and the Religious Elements Predicated on Obscurity and Ambivalence

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ABSTRACT

At close analysis, we can easily identify numerous medieval and early modern texts where the modern reader might find him/herself rather puzzled because the narrator seems to defy deliberately the essential purposes and strategies of all storytelling, that is, providing a logical plot, clear and unequivocal messages, relying on rational coherence, and offering a concrete conclusion. Of course, when we turn to didactic literature, which was highly popular throughout the Middle Ages and far beyond, such as the fable, the opposite was the case because the moralizing ending commonly and explicitly tells the audience what to expect and what to make out of the fictional account in moral, ethical, religious, or philosophical terms. But, what is also true, didactic accounts still require interpretation, even when there is no intentional obscurity. In essence, however, we might misunderstand the very meaning of many literary, especially courtly texts if we attempt to identify the critical lesson or the poet's motivation in straightforward terms, especially when we distinguish between the author and the text as an independent entity. In other words, we would go badly wrong if we searched for rigid and straightforward messages within the narrative framework of many medieval accounts because human words tend to defy all those didactic purposes or are used for very different ones than we...

Index Terms: Andreas Capellanus • Boccaccio • Heinrich Kaufringer • Marguerite de Navarre • Marie de France • medieval courtly literature • narrative ambivalence • obscurity • provocation

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FULL ABSTRACT

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Medieval Literature as Provocation, Challenge, and Discourse: The Erotic, the Philosophical, and the Religious Elements Predicated on Obscurity and Ambivalence

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Abstract

At close analysis, we can easily identify numerous medieval and early modern texts where the modern reader might find him/herself rather puzzled because the narrator seems to defy deliberately the essential purposes and strategies of all storytelling, that is, providing a logical plot, clear and unequivocal messages, relying on rational coherence, and offering a concrete conclusion. Of course, when we turn to didactic literature, which was highly popular throughout the Middle Ages and far beyond, such as the fable, the opposite was the case because the moralizing ending commonly and explicitly tells the audience what to expect and what to make out of the fictional account in moral, ethical, religious, or philosophical terms. But, what is also true, didactic accounts still require interpretation, even when there is no intentional obscurity. In essence, however, we might misunderstand the very meaning of many literary, especially courtly texts if we attempt to identify the critical lesson or the poet's motivation in straightforward terms, especially when we distinguish between the author and the text as an independent entity. In other words, we would go badly wrong if we searched for rigid and straightforward messages within the narrative framework of many medieval accounts because human words tend to defy all those didactic purposes or are used for very different ones than we might have expected. Of course, to look at it from another perspective, there were countless instructional texts (chronicles, letters, wills, medical treatises, sermons, etc.) which are clearly determined by the writer's intention and do not leave much wriggle room for the audience. At the same time, especially when we consider courtly literature, the entire issue becomes rather murky, which might be closely associated with the phenomenon itself, courtly love, a paradox in itself. This paper will highlight a number of major medieval narratives where obscurity, ambivalence, even confusion and duplicity, all the result of intentional poetic strategies, emerge as significant literary strategies that force the audience to become actively involved and to engage with the text as an intellectual, ethical, religious, or philosophical challenge. An intensive reading from the modern perspective actually confirms that medieval audiences must have felt similarly puzzled and provoked to discuss a specific text, even if the manuscript record does not necessarily confirm this. Identifying this epistemological phenomenon will enable us to grasp much more in depth the actual intellectual process behind the presentation of a fictional text to a medieval audience, which then will shed innovative light on the ultimate purpose of much of pre-modern but also modern and postmodern literature.

Keywords: *obscurity, narrative ambivalence, provocation, medieval courtly literature, Marie de France, Andreas Capellanus, Boccaccio, Heinrich Kaufringer, Marguerite de Navarre*

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1 Introduction

As recent scholarship has discovered, we can and must move away from a purely structural approach to pre-modern literature and recognize here, at least many times, narrative operations that allow the individual to find his/her interiority and also selfhood, contrasting the person with the social context and thus building meaningful connections between the protagonist and the audience, i.e., the outside reality as a

mirror of the fictional world (Brookes 2025). If we can uphold this new perception, we can recognize a major strategy by many of the major poets to engage critically with their audiences and to reach out to them in a provocative, didactic, but also religious and philosophical manner which might be much more similar to literary strategies today than we might have assumed (see the world of absurd literature). While the contributors to *The Medieval Literary* (Meyer-Lee and Sanok, eds., 2018) explore the relevance of form for the content to come to the

fore, the purpose of this paper is to identify the deliberate strategy by numerous pre-modern authors to resort to obscurity or ambivalence in order to provoke their audiences to carry out more intensive reflections upon the deep messages of their texts. Obscurity, however, does not mean the same thing as secrecy or the mysterious (cf. the contributions to Conermann, Wolter-von dem Knesebeck, and Quiering, eds., 2022). Instead, this unique and far-reaching phenomenon emerges when poets intentionally confound their audiences and include narrative barriers that prevent an easy understanding. In medieval German literature, for instance, the term ‘*wilde*’ (wild) indicated that a narrator deliberately withdrew into the mysteries of an obscuring account which defied a rational explanation at first sight. Both mystical narratives and allegorical poems were commonly predicated on *obscuritas* (see the contributions to Köbele and Frick, eds., 2018; none, however, engages with the literary material this paper will investigate), but obscurity and ambivalence often make their presence felt also in courtly romances, poetry, and verse narratives (for the phenomenon of nonsense, somewhat related to obscurity, see, e.g., Classen 2012; Kirk 2021). And, most importantly, the Bible itself, God’s divine narrative message, proved to be obscure and in great need of examination and exegesis (Evans 1991).

2 The mystery of love

When the Anglo-Norman writer Marie de France (fl. ca. 1160–ca. 1200) reflected upon the best approaches in composing courtly narratives, she faced numerous options and then chose one of them for her own purposes that mirrored the emphasis on obscurity. On the one hand, she created erotic tales, *lais*, on the other, *fables*, and she also authored a religious tale, *Espurgatoire saint Partiz*. My focus here will rest on the first corpus of narratives contained in the British Library MS Harley 978 because the latter two fall into a very different category which is not relevant for this study. In the *lais*, by contrast, the poet offers narrative accounts pertaining to love and marriage that challenge the audience extensively and raise numerous questions we continue to struggle with until today (for a good overview, McCallum 1993; she refers, for instance to Dante’s *Divina Commedia* [ca. 1320], fourteenth-century Italian *dolce stil nuovo* by Cavalcanti or Guinzelli, to Boccaccio’s *Genealogia deorum gentium*, and then quickly moves to sixteenth-century English literature).

This phenomenon actually goes to the heart of any good literary text which intends to provide more than just entertainment, creating layers of meaning, a *mise en abyme*. In the general prologue, Marie addresses the key notion about literature as already formulated by the Roman grammarian Priscian (fl. ca. 500), emphasizing that a good writer would deliberately implement obscurity in his/her text: “Assez obscurement diseient” (Waters, ed., 2018, 12) so that the readers or listeners would be encouraged to search for the meaning and to figure out what the messages might entail. She envisioned, in other words, an intensive interaction between the poet and the audience, transforming the literary text into a medium for self-reflection, critical investigations, and, in short, for epistemology at large, or an intellectual challenge. After all, these *lais* address fundamental questions pertaining to human happiness, love, marriage, and the quest for self-fulfillment within an erotic relationship. Moreover, Marie’s verse narratives address a number of social, political, economic, and religious issues that have not lost any of their significance in modern times. Hence, as she emphasizes in the prologue, “Whoever wishes to protect himself from wrongdoing / should study and understand / and begin a heavy task; / through this he can further distance himself / and deliver himself from great sorrow” (23–27).

In other words, the fictional account turns into a narrative platform for fundamental if not existential issues pertaining to happiness, though

Marie did not, as far as I can tell, address Boethian concepts in explicit terms. Of course, we see throughout her collection how much the notion of fortune and misfortune (the wheel of fortune) matters centrally, with the lives of the various individuals going up and down without them having much control, if any, over it – see the mysterious ship in “Guigemar,” the fairy lady in “Lanval,” or the falcon man in “Yonec” – but she does not engage specifically with Boethius’s *Consolatio de philosophiae* (ca. 524 C.E.). To this we would have to add the contributions by Martianus Capella in his famous *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (early fifth century), both being the essential textbooks in late antiquity and the Middle Ages and so also for this Anglo-Norman poet, but again, Marie hides her familiarity also with this influential treatise behind her fictional account (Mickel 2011, 50–51). Obscurity was not a literary failure but a major strategy to invite the audience into a conversation with her about the essence of love, certainly a most difficult topic (Mickel 2011, 59).

Instead of drawing on Latin sources for her own literary enterprise, Marie decided to turn her attention to ancient Breton tales which obviously carried deep wisdom for her and which she wanted to share with her audience, though she systematically incorporated a shield of obscurity, as she said earlier, to encourage the readers/listeners to embark on a thorough investigation of what the ultimate meaning of her *lais* might be. Whereas Latin sources would not help her to demonstrate her own creativity and inventiveness, because many other writers had already utilized them, those vernacular texts proved to be most productive for Marie because the ancient poets “made them for remembrance” (35). Although the poet uses the term “*aventures*” (36; adventures), the deeper meaning easily proves to be much more profound than simple entertainment, especially because she dedicated her stories to the king whom she praised as the representative of all joy and courtly values: “in whose heart every good thing takes root” (46) (Bloch 2003; Kinoshita and McCracken 2012; see also the contributions to Whalen, ed., 2011, where the focus, though, rests on source questions and not on obscurity as a philosophical concept).

At first sight, most of Marie’s *lais* appear to be fairly straightforward, composed almost in the vein of a fairy tale, highlighting erotic conflicts, people’s wrongdoings, and presenting individuals in search of happiness. However, as soon as we take a second look, we realize massive problems for the various lovers or married couples, and many times, nothing is really clear since the outcomes appear to be baffling and astounding, if not contradictory, such as in the sweet and painful “*Laüstic*” with its many layers of meaning that draw us ever more deeply into the text (Small 2013). In “*Guigemar*,” a miraculous force enters the lives of the two protagonists and makes it possible for them to marry, and we cannot tell whether the poet had God, destiny, or Love in absolute terms in mind. In “*Lanval*,” the social and legal conditions break down, which forces Lanval to depart from this world and to join his beloved who disappears in the utopian world of Avalon. In “*Equitan*,” adultery and cheating ultimately kill both lovers, which leaves the audience with many questions because the meaning of each one of those stories remains obscure.

In “*Bisclavret*,” for instance, a married woman deeply worries about the troubling disappearance of her husband for three days every week without any explanation. She finally forces him to reveal the secret, although he is truly worried that this could be catastrophic for himself: “*Trouble will come to me if I tell you, / for I will divide you from my love / and destroy myself in doing so*” (54–56). This does not deter her, and instead she pushes on until she has learned the horrifying and for her – and also for us today – incomprehensible truth. Moreover, once she has subsequently learned where he hides his clothing, which would be essential for his re-transformation back into his human shape,

Bisclavret's destiny is sealed. She requests from a knight who had loved her for a long time to remove the clothing, which then, indeed, makes it impossible for the werewolf to recover his previous identity. The lady did not love that other knight but used him for her selfish strategy. Curiously, though, she had insisted to her husband, "I love you more than all the world: / you should hide nothing from me, / nor mistrust me in any way" (80–82). But once she has all the knowledge needed, she basically betrays and destroys Bisclavret, who is subsequently forced to roam the forest as a wild beast (for various recent interpretations of this and other verse narratives in the context of 'bestiality,' see the contributions to Stuhmiller, ed. 2025, which, however, ultimately do not make much sense because theory here trumps philological accuracy; cf. my review, 2026; as to werewolves, see Scanduto 2008).

Bisclavret is lucky, however, in his worst moment when hunters have caught up with him and are about to kill him. In his desperation, the werewolf submits under the king and demonstrates, as Arthur clearly recognizes, his understanding and acceptance of the feudal rules and customs. Thus, he reveals a certain degree of human reason, so the king spares his life and includes him in a most friendly manner in his court company: "He commanded all his people / to take good care of it for love of him / and not ill-treat it in any way" (170–72). Everything then looks normal, and no one seems to notice Bisclavret's monstrous appearance for some time until he encounters first the knight who had stolen his clothing, and then his wife, both of whom he attacks ferociously, while he treats everyone else peacefully. A wise advisor realizes this difference, alerts the king to this phenomenon, and once the wife has been forced to reveal the truth – after the werewolf has bitten off her nose – Bisclavret is given back his clothing, so he can finally regain his human shape, whereas his former wife has to live in shame and disgrace.

The conclusion, which consists of King Arthur welcoming and embracing the long-lost knight – "he hugs and kisses him" (301) – seems to signal the glorification of masculinity and the dismissal of the female role, but there are numerous motifs and themes hidden in the story that give us much reason to pause. Scholars have long debated who might be at fault in this *lai*. Was the lady correct in forcing her husband to reveal the truth? Was Bisclavret to be blamed for his secret and lack of communication with his wife? Why was she so horrified about the idea that her husband regularly turns into a werewolf, while King Arthur displayed magnanimity and respect for the noble beast behind the horrible appearance? Can we so easily dispense with guilt and blame as the outcome seems to indicate?

There are, to be sure, many different perspectives to be considered because both sides in this marriage demonstrate an extensive degree of character flaws, with open and trusting communication being the first victim in their fractured marriage. Even though the outcome implies that the narrator condemns the wife for her betrayal, especially because the king "drove her out of the region" (306) and that the homosocial friendship receives the highest respect, there are troublesome aspects altogether that force us to reflect more deeply about the consequences and reasons for the various developments.

The wife was basically justified in being concerned about her husband's mysterious disappearance on a regular basis, which forced her to suspect him of having an affair with another woman. And he was at fault for not having revealed to her his secret, denying her any opportunity to share this strange experience with her husband. In other words, Bisclavret simultaneously lives in two worlds, two existential dimensions, straddling the shore of human civilization and the shore of wilderness and bestiality within himself. Tragically for their marriage, his wife cannot understand or even acknowledge that strange phenomenon and thus tries to cut the epistemological bridge Bisclavret constantly crosses. Oddly, but very meaningfully, in the long run she loses herself

and is expelled from courtly society (loss of her nose as a most shameful punishment).

Referring to her allegedly deep love for him, she forces her husband to reveal that he transforms into that beast once every week, but she is not strong enough to handle this shocking revelation or alternative perspective. But we also need to keep in mind how the hunters react when they track down and circle the werewolf, immediately ready to kill the beast (144–45). We could hence view the entire marriage relationship as deeply flawed, with both sides being rather weak characters (for some relevant and recent research, see, e.g., Creamer 2002; Schneider 2016). Although scholars have claimed that there is a virtual agreement that the wife carries most of the guilt (Martin 2013), at closer analysis, this is not necessarily the case because Bisclavret reveals a considerably weak character as well and deserves much criticism because he hides his secret even from his own wife, does not trust her inner strength to cope with the truth of his shape-shifting – maybe rightly so – and then takes vicious revenge of her and her descendants over generations because of her understandable terror once she has learned what he is doing in private far away from her.

Granted, Arthur acknowledges him as a noble creature, and among the men at his court, the other knights, Bisclavret manages to operate successfully. However, he is not a man destined to maintain his marriage, so his transformation might well be a symbol of his inability to come to terms with his wife, their conjugal love, and the necessity for a married couple to communicate effectively. We never learn why this shape-shifting takes place, but it is certainly the cause of the breakdown of their marriage insofar as the dimension of wilderness deeply troubles and terrifies the wife. While the narrator explicitly puts blame on her, calling her behavior 'treason' (125), it would seem unfair to expect that she should have acted differently in light of the hunters' similar desire to tear the beast apart as soon as they can, if their king did not withhold them in the last minute because he recognized the werewolf's inner nobility. The critical issue hence, which remains hidden in the strategic obscurity of the tale, consists of the tension between culture and nature, courtliness and beastliness.

Marie provokes us deeply with this ancient Breton tale, which proves to be considerably more complex than a superficial reading indicates. Even though the narrator evaluates the wife rather harshly, it would not be fully appropriate to put all the blame on her alone. This is especially the case because Bisclavret had promised to tell her everything she would ask him (39–41), and yet then demurred when she touched on his secret. The conflict comes to a head after she had probed the issue long enough: "Many times she asked him" (59), and although he knows only too well that the revelation will destroy both, he finally yields. He even tells her where he hides his clothing, and this despite the fact that it extremely endangers him: "for if I should lose them / and were discovered due to this, / I would be a werewolf always" (73–75). Again, emphasizing her love and their marriage, the lady succeeds in extracting that secret from him as well, which bodes his doom, as he had been fully aware.

We really have to wonder about Bisclavret's weakness in this matter, whereas the narrator badly maligns the lady who uses her coaxing, flattery, and pestering so much that she can overpower her husband (for the typical misogyny in this episode, which was reflected throughout the entire period from late antiquity to the nineteenth century and beyond, see Blamires, ed., 1992): "he could not do otherwise, and so he told her" (88). But the poet also emphasizes that the wife is deeply terrified about the truth of the matter and feels horrified about the idea of lying in bed next to a man who turns into a werewolf on a regular basis (102).

Only the king is able to recognize the noble character in Bisclavret, apart from the advisor who prevents the court from exploding in physical

violence against the werewolf because he can perceive some of the hidden causes for its aggression against the knight and then the latter's wife, Bisclavret's former spouse. The obscurity cast over the entire story represents, as we may conclude, a narrative veil the readers/listeners have to penetrate in order to recognize the spiritual dimension behind the physical form. The king and his advisor know how to do that, but no one else.

However, we as readers are invited to follow their model and to build epistemological tools to comprehend our world more deeply, with many secrets shrouded in ugly masks. It might go too far to recognize here a literary example of the four levels of exegesis as applied in medieval biblical studies, the quadriga (literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical; see, e.g., Hugh of St Victor's *Didascalicon*, 1125, Bernard Silvestris's *Cosmographia*, 1147, and Alanus ab Insulis's *Plaint of Nature*, ca. 1170, and his *Anticlaudianus*, ca. 1175; for the latest research on this topic, see the contributions to Gillhammer and Southgate, eds., 2026; for the most seminal study, see Lubac 1959/2009).

Considering the lady's destiny, we might have to identify her as a tragic figure, whereas Bisclavret remains a mysteriously ambivalent character, just as all werewolves were most strange and deeply feared. After all, Marie talked about a werewolf, and not an ordinary wolf, hence drew here from a mythical notion of another dimension. Not surprisingly, there remains much to be discussed, and although Marie concludes on a rather satisfactory note, at least for the knight, there is no real resolution. Does Bisclavret, for instance, never return to his werewolf shape? Does he not love women, although he actually professes the opposite to his wife early on (23 and 55)? Is he really happy about turning into a werewolf, as Larissa Tracy recently claimed (Tracy 2025, 155; she even assumes that he is "frolicking naked in the woods," which is clearly made up and not stated in the text)? On the contrary, he is greatly afraid that he might lose her love, might not be able to return to his human shape, and thus would have to face, in the narrator's words, his "maubailiz" (126). And finally, the king and his men express great delight about Bisclavret's recovery and welcome him back to human society (300–01), so it would be erroneous to identify his existence as a werewolf as a desired stage for the protagonist, although Cohen (2012) assumes the very opposite counter to the actual textual account.

Lycanthropy has always been viewed with horror and as a devastating transgression of human existence; so, considering it as an ideal in contrast to the triviality, banality, and maybe corruption of human society (again, see Cohen 2012) represents, as far as I can see it, a grave misreading (for the history of werewolves, see Otten, ed., 1985; Hertz and Leubuscher 1850/2018; for a concise survey, see Glosecki 2000). Instead, as we may conclude, Bisclavret turning into a werewolf represents his move away from human culture and the return to the primordial existence, although he is never characterized as evil in that shape. Marie's *lai* thus forces us to investigate most critically the meaning of chivalry, courtly identity, marital love, ethics, and morality, and all that in contrast to the deep forest, the wilderness, and the ferociousness of the werewolf.

Intriguingly, when we turn to Marie's "Eliduc," the last *lai* in her collection as contained in the Harley 978 manuscript, the audience is exposed to yet another huge puzzle which has not yet been fully solved until today, but here seen from the opposite perspective compared to "Bisclavret." Again, the issues at stake are love and marriage, although the broader context addresses political concerns, which we can leave aside for the current investigation, that is, Eliduc's banishment from the court and his exile in England. Marie engages here with the general problem of corrupt courts and the dangerous impact of cabals negatively influencing the idealized protagonist (Classen 2024, 115–39). However, during his stay in Exeter where Eliduc fights for a threatened king and

achieves a major military victory, the princess falls in love with him and begins to woo him, to which he quickly responds enthusiastically, although he is married and left his loyal wife behind. Marie thus focuses on the dilemma which Eliduc faces, being in love with this young woman and yet distraught over his disloyalty to his wife (Whitfield 1999; Classen 2015; cf. also the discussion by Kinoshita and McCracken 2012, 125–39, 209–10; regarding the issue of marriage, see now Krueger, Jahner, and Nelson 2022).

Not uncharacteristic of all of Marie's *lais*, the male protagonist knows well how to fight and to command his army, easily achieving his military goals, but when emotional matters surface, the intervention by the female figure becomes necessary, unless she herself turns into the vehicle for the hero's downfall and death (e.g., "Equitan"). As in the case of "Bisclavret," my intention here is not to probe the issue of marriage as such, as important as it certainly proves to be. I also do not need to investigate the role of the weasel which finds a magical petal with which the wife can recover her husband's beloved from her coma. All what matters for us is the highly complex and fascinating figure of his first wife, Guildelüec, who demonstrates a shocking level of understanding, grace, and tolerance toward her husband, who has fallen in love with the English princess, Guilliadun, and who is now crest-fallen over her seeming death.

Several factors within the *lai* deserve to be highlighted before we can turn to the critical topic itself. The princess had been the active agent in this love relationship, but she had never inquired about Eliduc's marital status. She agreed to their elopement, but when their ship, with which they cross the Channel, runs into a mighty storm and thus could sink, a sailor calls out, warning Eliduc that this would be God's punishment for breaking his marital vows; hence, he urges them to throw the young woman overboard as a kind of sacrifice. Eliduc is aghast, takes an oar, slays the sailor, and pushes his body into the water. Then, he takes over the rudder and manages to steer the ship safely into the harbor. However, the maid is so distraught about the truth of the matter that she falls into a coma. Eliduc then carries her body to an abandoned hermit's cell and places it on the altar. From that time on, he begins a ritual of praying to his beloved, but nothing changes. However, his wife notices his sorrowful appearance and discovers what is going on, but instead of fighting against the unavoidable, that is, the loss of her marriage, she acknowledges her husband's new feelings and simply accepts this situation. She is no longer Eliduc's wife and pursues the goal of turning into the abbess of a newly established monastery. According to medieval theological concepts, this was virtually the only possible option to dissolve a marriage and yet to maintain one's honor, but it required mutual agreement. To be sure, twelfth-century theologians discussed such a situation quite intensively, and Marie joined that discourse with her own perspective (Brundage 1987, 374–76).

We face, however, a rather amazing situation because the wife had certainly loved her husband and she continues to treat him with the greatest respect, not abandoning her emotional attachments to him. In fact, she continues in her efforts to make him happy even after she has realized that he has broken his marriage vows and that he is actually hurting her badly regarding their loyalty pledge. But Guildelüec is full of admiration of the princess whose beauty appears to be unmatched by any other woman. As she tells her servant, "For pity on the one hand, for love on the other, / I will never be happy again" (1027–28). There is no indication that she might be queer, so her expression can only indicate that she is truly impressed by Guilliadun's physical appearance and regards her as a nearly divine creature who deserves her full respect.

However, once the young woman has woken up, she bitterly complains about Eliduc who had betrayed and abandoned her, had lied to her about his marital status, and so had deceived her. She goes so far

as to condemn all men: “Mut est fole que humme creit!” (1084), but Guildeiuec calms her down, assures her of Eliduc’s love for her and hence his great grief over her presumed death. Moreover, she underscores her great joy seeing her ‘competitor’ alive again and emphasizes that she would withdraw voluntarily from their marriage and thus free Eliduc to join hands with the English princess. We might wonder who this highly honorable and dignified wife might be who has no hesitation to turn away from the world and take the veil (1102), not because she feels a particularly religious calling but because serving God would be an elegant solution for all three of them. Eliduc demonstrates great happiness and “tenderly thanks his wife” (1114), subsequently granting her all the land and resources needed to build a monastery.

Intriguingly, when the new couple has grown old, they also decide to join a monastic community, which conformed to the theological precepts in such cases. Guilliadun is warmly welcomed by Guildeiuec, and Eliduc enters his own monastery, but all three stay in close contact with each other, exchanging greetings and inquiries via a messenger, all three striving hard to lead a good religious life. As the narrator emphasizes: “They would pray to God for their beloved, / that He should be merciful to him” (1171–72), which intimately merges the erotic-human dimension with the spiritual-divine (Kestle 2022).

Although the princess voices considerable criticism of her lover because he is not present the very moment she wakes up from her coma, she is well taken care of by the wife, and then everything else develops harmoniously as if divorcing, even for religious reasons, was such a light matter (for marriage policies and laws, at least within Middle High German literature, see now Martin 2025; see also Cartlidge 1997; Santinelle-Foltz 2022, and, most fundamentally, Brundage 1987). We are confronted with numerous mystifying figures and animals, above all Eliduc’s wife as a most generous and honorable individual and the weasel which procures the magical petal to revive its dead companion. We also would have to ask whom the young princess might represent because her physical beauty seems to be out of this world, since even Guildeiuec admires her profoundly.

It is understandable that, when the protagonist and his beloved travel across the Channel to return to his country, one of the sailors calls out what Eliduc was doing wrongly, and yet, asking for the sacrifice of the princess would have been murder. But even though Eliduc then manages to steer the ship to the safe harbor, he had killed the sailor, which is never mentioned again. Placing the body of his beloved on the altar and embarking on a long-term ritual of constant prayer translates the young woman into a religious symbol, almost like the holy host itself, or a relic. However, the chapel constitutes an equally puzzling space because it has been abandoned after the hermit who used to live there had died. Death and life, love and hatred intricately interweave throughout this *lai*, and to this we could also add the combination of politics (Eliduc’s malignment and forced exile) with the military aspects – bad and good at the same time. Eliduc is eventually redeemed and called back by his king whom he rescues from his enemies, reestablishing peace and control of the kingdom (741–44).

Whenever we see him in action, either on the battlefield or at court, Eliduc demonstrates to be a superior protagonist successfully in charge of himself and his social environment. But as soon as love has affected him, he loses his agency and depends both on the princess and then his own wife to solve the dilemma in his marriage. Finally, even though he greatly respects his first wife and deeply loves his second one, eventually, all three join a monastic community and thus serve God. There is much sorrow throughout the narrative, and much joy, especially at the end because Eliduc can marry the princess and his wife can begin a new life as an abbess.

All this, however, does not simply dissolve the general unease embedded in this text because the protagonist, while being portrayed in glorious terms when he resolutely fights for his king and then the English one, ultimately seems to be almost helpless with regard to women. It is Guilliadun who woos Eliduc and wins his heart. And it is Guildeiuec who takes charge after she has discovered the princess, paving the way for her husband to find his personal happiness, and this to her own disadvantage. We are really tasked to employ a theological reading here, although the narrator refuses to admit any hints of that kind.

Not surprisingly, this *lai* concludes the collection because its deliberate obscurity invites so many questions that must have kept the courtly audience busy for a long time, weighing the various options presented here, balancing out the evaluations of the male character and his female partners. Whenever choices have to be made, as in this story, fundamental problems emerge, but those also invite critical discussions, which could be considered as the ultimate purpose of any good literary text (Rothschild 2011, 97). We know of another tale, *Ille et Galeron* by Gautier d’Arras, where the protagonist faces the same dilemma of two wives, most likely modeled after Marie’s “Eliduc” (Kinoshita and McCracken 2012, 209–10), and each time, the audience was asked to reflect upon this critical problem and to make up their own minds, especially because the ideals of knighthood and courtly love are pitted against each other.

3 An explanation or teaching gone wrong, or simply practicing ‘obscurity’

Modern scholarship continues to struggle hard when it turns to the curious love treatise, *De amore*, by the Parisian cleric Andreas Capellanus (ca. 1180/1190). Here, a teacher addresses, so it seems, his student Walter and announces that he wants to help him understand the intricacies of the powerful experience of love. In the first two books, there is only one authorial thrust, outlining ways for the realization of a love affair, outside of the bonds of marriage. This is fully confirmed many times through legal statements regarding the universal value of love or allegorical and literary comments confirming that as well. However, in the third book, Andreas completely turns around and argues vehemently against women and against courtly love as a force threatening to destroy the individual and his salvation because such an affair outside of the bonds of marriage would be entirely against God’s rules. We undoubtedly observe strong contradictions within the treatise, beginning in the preface, continuing in the many dialogues between a man and a woman – most of the time of different classes, meaning that the wooer clashes with the lady in social terms – and being confirmed in the radical, almost hostile conclusion.

Most scholars have basically abandoned their efforts to make sense out of *De amore* and read only selections to avoid some of the aporias contained in the treatise (e.g., Monson 2005; Baldwin 1994; Allen 1992). However, a simple way out of these dilemmas would be to tackle the problems head-on and to accept those as a given, probably intentionally so, in order to play with various narrative traditions (primarily Ovid, of course, but then also the Arthurian romance and allegorical poems) and to demonstrate the phenomenon of dialectics in the first place (Parry, trans., 1941/1969; for the critical edition, along with a German translation, see Knapp, trans., 2006).

In his preface, Andreas confesses his love for his student and friend Walter and pronounces that he wants to teach him how “love between two lovers may be kept unharmed” (27) and how that same love can be overcome, which echoes Ovid’s highly ironic *Ars amatoria*. However, the narrator admits that he speaks from personal experiences which he does not qualify in any specific ways. Even though he opines that no prudent person should dedicate him/herself much to the issue of

love, his “affection” for Walter coerces him to approach the topic after all. Once he would have learned the lesson, his “progress in it will be more cautious” (27). The subsequent sections of Book One and Two unequivocally lay out the principles of love, what it means, and how to pursue it. There is no question left at the end that love outside of the bonds of marriage is an ideal Andreas strongly advocates despite a number of satirical or only ironic comments here and there that shed an odd light on the treatise and the narrator. Andreas seems to discuss every possible feature of love in a rational, transparent fashion – maybe based on his own experiences – and we are repeatedly informed, nay, instructed about the fundamental features of this emotional phenomenon no one can extricate him/herself from, disregarding all rules by the Church to pursue love only within the bonds of marriage. In fact, there are several passages where a legal discourse confirms the value of love, such as at the end of the Arthurian tale concluding Book Two, consisting of thirty-one rules and explanations, such as no. 8: “No one should be deprived of love without the very best of reasons” (185). Or no. 14: “The easy attainment of love makes it of little value; difficulty of attainment makes it prized” (185).

However, beginning with Book Three, the very opposite comes to the fore; Andreas suddenly no longer wants to appear as an advocate of love, on the contrary, since he then launches a vehement cannonade against women at large and hence also against love. He had provided Walter with his instructions not with the intention to advise to pursue love, “but for fear lest you might think us stupid” (187). Now, we are suddenly told that “any man who devotes his efforts to love loses all his usefulness” (187). But ‘usefulness’ for what or for whom? As the first two books have taught us, love proves to be of high value to develop one’s eloquence, character, and social role. Yet, here, Andreas embarks on a radical crusade against all love outside the bonds of marriage and also against women at large. He goes so far as to accuse them of never returning a man’s love and blocking men’s passage to heaven in the afterlife (210). Heterosexual love would deprive the man from his friendships and from God’s love (211), but Andreas also reveals his internal contradictions because he absolutizes the third book over the two others and hence entirely dismisses everything he had stated before (211), probably a direct allusion to his classical source, Ovid, now informed by the scholastic principles of disputations. Whereas before, he spoke as an expert of love, as a teacher, and loyal advisor, here the narrator turns into a sour preacher and doomsayer talking only about imminent death and a person’s need to prepare him/herself for the last moment in life (212).

Overall, as I would suggest, *De amore* does not ultimately provide a clear message and does not intend to do so in the first place; instead it provokes readers, operates with much obscurity and ambivalence, and teases the recipient of the treatise, Walter, with first outlining at length how to woo a lady, what to say and how to act, which is all undergirded with definitive and legal comments about the nature and importance of love, and subsequently rejecting it all in a dialectical fashion (Classen 2013). The reader, until today, is left in a stage of bewilderment, but the topic of love would be bewildering at any rate all by itself, so the contradictory nature of Andreas’s treatise only confirms the value of obscurity as an epistemological tool to explore even the most evanescent themes in life, such as love, then God, and human erotic desire. *De amore* is, as Constance Brittain Bouchard has argued (2003), “a balance between opposites” (142), and she comments, viewing the major trends in twelfth-century philosophy, “Andreas found a narrative technique in a play of opposites” (143). Intriguingly, since late antiquity, major theologians have discussed the entire complex of love, marriage, sexuality, divorce, and transgressions in a rather complex, at times even contradictory fashion (Brundage 1987), often directly opposed by

secular, aristocratic society. Andreas was fully in tune with this clerical discourse and appears to reflect upon it here with tongue-in-cheek, drawing fully on the rhetorical strategy of ambivalence and obscurity to illustrate the many possible perspectives.

4 The cruel husband and the patient wife

For further confirmation of this literary phenomenon predicated on obscurity, ambivalence, and provocation, we can most effectively refer to the last, the tenth, story told on day ten in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (ca. 1350) where the issue presented reflects a much darker and psychologically violent dimension. Here, Griselda, the daughter of an impoverished peasant, is chosen by the Marquise of Saluzzo, Gualtieri, as his wife, but he imposes terrible and cruel tests of loyalty upon her which last many years. She does not even know why he treats her so viciously and learns only at the very end the secret purpose of his harsh words and horrible actions against her. Finally, once he has fully recognized that he can completely rely on her loyalty and obedience as his wife, he reveals his hidden strategy, and happiness thus enters also her life because her two children are returned to her, and her husband embraces her with love and honor (McWilliam, trans., 1972/1995). He had increasingly pretended to hate her, and had ultimately played the mean game of seemingly sending her away and marrying another woman, who then turns out to be their own daughter.

The story of Griselda was hotly debated following Boccaccio’s publication, translated, adapted, and transformed (Marabito 1988; Landi, ed., 2001; Rüegg 2019) both in Italy (Petrarch) and in Germany (Aurnhammer and Schiewer, eds., 2010), for instance. Her suffering in this bad marriage aroused many opinions, which explains the rich reception history. Here we face the difficult situation of a tyrannical husband who badly abuses his wife not out of sadism or cruelty but simply because he wants to test her, which, however, turns into cruelty after all. Gualtieri’s subjects vehemently object to his behavior, especially because they believe that he had murdered his children. As the narrator emphasizes: “His subjects . . . roundly condemned him . . . [while] the women . . . offered her their sympathy in the loss of her children” (789). Moreover, he praises Griselda as the worthiest person alive who demonstrated greatest endurance under her terrible husband, whose strategies were “cruel and unheard of” (795). Strangely, however, once the story has been concluded, there are no further discussions amongst the entire group of storytellers; instead, the focus then turns to the preparations for the return home to Florence. This odd silence, this refusal to engage with Gualtieri’s cruel testing of his wife’s loyalty, amounts to another form of obscurity, certainly implemented to prod the audience to reflect on and argue about this curious marriage relationship. After all, Boccaccio as a storyteller did not assume that his audience would simply accept his accounts without developing their own opinions, since many of his novelle constitute strong provocations and challenge many traditional viewpoints, such as the ring parable told in story three on day one, certainly an expression of medieval or early modern tolerance (Classen 2018, ch. 5).

By contrast, in the French *Heptaméron* (1558/1559) by Marguerite de Navarre, which was a literary enterprise to outdo the *Decameron* particularly from a female perspective, the discussions prove to be rather heated revealing considerable differences between the men and women storytellers (Chilton, trans, 1984). At the end of story no. 3, for instance, we hear: “During this exchange one of the ladies had started to laugh. She knew that the lady who had just taken Saffredent’s words to be aimed at her was not in fact so much the object of his affections that he would put up with cuckoldry, disgrace or injury of any kind for her sake” (89). Or, before story no. 6 begins, the narrator emphasizes: “I want to tell

a story to show you that women can exercise their [cleverness] for bad purposes as well as for good ones" (101). This kind of argumentation then continues throughout the entire book, and while the fictional characters carry out their intensive debates, the actual audiences outside of the text are given a narrative platform to explore the issues presented in the stories, in which gender conflicts and tensions make up the center attention. Obscurity might not be at play here, but in a certain sense, it is present after all in the form of ambivalent narrative perspectives, contrasting views about the protagonists, and discussions among the storytellers.

There are, both in Boccaccio's example of Griselda and in Marie de France's collection of tales, plenty examples of difficult issues involved in the storytelling. Just as Marie de France, these two late medieval poets also relied on ambivalence and provocation to energize and provoke their listeners/readers and to trigger new conversations relevant for society at large. The term 'obscurity,' however, hence would have to be translated into something like 'deliberate ambivalence' which would serve as an intellectual challenge or motivator to investigate the issue presented more deeply, whether it is the werewolf Bisclavret or the patient Griselda. Consistently, the fictional accounts present considerable challenges and require deeper analysis when we want to come to terms with the sometimes even dialectical or paradoxical conditions within the respective texts. Let us briefly consider this phenomenon further as it appears in other late medieval verse narratives, before we conclude this study (for parallel cases involving especially the two famous lover Abelard and Heloise, see Godman 2009).

5 The obscurity of the world

In the verse narratives by the South German poet Heinrich Kaufringer living in the vicinity of Augsburg and active around 1400, we encounter many intriguing examples of puzzling topics and themes (Classen, trans., 2014/2019). In several cases, obscurity, provocation, ambivalence, and also incomprehensibility dominate and challenge the readers/listeners to come to terms with the messages conveyed. In no. 14, "The Innocent Murderess," for instance, we are confronted with a strongly paradoxical case involving a young countess who is about to marry the king but is terribly abused first by a vicious knight who pretends to be her fiancé and forces her to sleep with him. When she later realizes the deception, she manages to cut off his head, but she cannot carry the corpse away and drop it in the castle well. When she asks her own gatekeeper for help, he agrees, but only on the condition of her granting sex with him. She has no alternative but to agree, and yet she subsequently manages to throw him into the well as well as a punishment for his evil demand. Finally, before the first wedding night, she asks her most trustworthy maid to sleep with her husband to avoid him finding out that she had lost her virginity (79–80). Tragically, the maid then betrays her lady and insists on staying in the marital bed because she wants to become the new queen. In her desperation, the countess sets fire to the room, drags her husband out of the bed and leaves with him, locking the door behind her, which condemns the maid to death.

So, altogether, she has murdered three people, but the narrator subsequently identifies her as 'innocent' because she had been forced to commit those deeds to protect herself, her husband, and their marriage. Nevertheless, she feels guilty for the rest of her life and finally, thirty years later, reveals the truth to the king. However, he views all this very differently than we might have expected: "'You had to pay dearly for me, . . . I want to live with you forever as your loyal servant because you have suffered much on my behalf, no doubt about it. Neither your honor nor my appreciation of you will ever be diminished through any punishment, either secretly or publicly, because of this story'" (81–82).

In strictly legal terms, the countess was certainly guilty of murder, but the narrator commented on her crime quite differently: "the noble king acted properly because the lady never did anything evil and yet fell into great sorrow without guilt or intention" (82). The last word is repeated several times to assure us as the audience that she had acted innocently and only defended herself, as gruesome as her actions appear to be. She fought with all her energy and amazing resoluteness to defend herself and to protect the king's honor as well. This entailed, at least for her, to operate outside of the laws and to pursue justice by herself. So, while she turns into a murderess, she really defends herself most impressively and thus gains, at least indirectly, a certain degree of innocence after all (Rippl 2017). As much as public laws determine society at large, in this case, the countess's actions undermine their absolute relevance and highlight the need in human life to acknowledge alternative conditions that are not regulatable by laws alone. The narrative ambivalence constitutes legal obscurity, but the outcome of the story suggests a meaningful way out of this dilemma because the individual's actions cannot be evaluated only by means of a narrow and strict legal grid once set up and allegedly firmly in place for eternity. As we are asked to understand, laws are human constructs and thus also liable to be changed, adapted, and developed further. Not surprisingly, for instance, the theological debate regarding love, sex, and marriage developed in many different ways and directions from late antiquity to the early seventeenth century, and actually from there on as well (Brundage 1987).

From this point we could move to numerous other *mæren* by Kaufringer, such as no. 1 "The Hermit and the Angel," no. 4 "The Mayor and the Prince," or no. 6 "The Search for the Happily Married Couple." Each time, the audience is definitively stunned and invited to reflect deeply on the ultimate meaning of the story addressing either religious or erotic themes. The more challenging the literary account proves to be, that is, 'obscure,' the more deeply the listener/reader is tasked with probing the ultimate meaning of the text. Thus, the narrator, very much like in all previous cases, engages his audience in an intellectual exchange and thus initiates a public debate about fundamental ethical, moral, religious, and philosophical issues (for major and fundamental studies on Kaufringer's texts, see Stede 1993; Rippl 2014).

6 Conclusion

As Marie de France expressed it explicitly, and as we have observed it in many other cases as well, obscurity, ambivalence, and hence conceptual and thematic provocations served those medieval poets exceedingly well to highlight the thinly hidden messages and to provoke the audience to venture out of their comfort zone. We could easily cite countless other examples of obscurity, or 'wilde' in Middle High German, as a deliberate literary strategy, such as Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*, the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the *Pearl* poem, the stories contained in the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, or Fernando de Rojas's *La Celestina*, and then trace this intricate literary strategy also in early modern and modern literature (for a focus on the 'wild' narration, see Schuler-Lang 2014). Nowhere do we observe any example of plain entertainment without challenges; pre-modern literature was deeply determined by the impetus to investigate, discuss, teach, convey, preach, or instruct, inviting the audience to uncover the various layers of meaning and to recognize behind the superficial narrative screen of triviality the profound reflections and ideas determining fundamentally human culture and spirituality (from the historical to the moral, to the allegorical, and possibly also to the anagogical; cf. Lubac 1959/2009).

While didactic literature pursued those goals rather explicitly, much of religious-religious-erotic and other courtly literature relied more heavily on the elements of deliberate confusion, symbolism, metaphors, mystical visions, and allegory. Interestingly, the strategy of implementing obscurity, or the hermetic, as an aesthetic and intellectual tool can also be discovered in modern literature (Baeumler 1967; De Man, 1983; Mehtonen, ed., 2007; Tucker 2011; Mellors 2024; and, most recently, Thomas B. in a blog at <https://heavyfeatherreview.org/2026/02/25/obscurity/>), but this is not the topic of the current paper. Nevertheless, discovering the huge impact of the narrative veil (obscurity) that prevents superficial reading and requires a serious investigation within medieval and early modern literature builds a significant hermeneutic bridge between the past and the present in cultural-historical, philosophical, and religious-spiritual terms while shedding much new light on many rather problematic pre-modern fictional works and promises to solve numerous puzzles (cf. also the contributions to Doležalová, Rider, and Zironi, ed., 2013, though those do not address any of the texts discussed here and do not recognize the hermeneutic valence of obscurity particularly in medieval literature).

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An Analysis of the Impact of Public Debt on Economic Growth in Zambia (1990–2020)

CORRESPONDENCE →



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ABSTRACT

Research Aims: This study examines the relationship between Zambia's national debt and its economic expansion. Specifically, it investigates how central government debt, foreign direct investment (FDI), total debt service, and gross capital formation influence real GDP per capita over the period 1990 to 2020. **Design/Methodology/Approach:** An Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model estimated using EViews statistical software was employed. Annual time series data spanning 1990–2020 were sourced from the World Development Indicators (WDI) database maintained by the World Bank. The model examines both short-run and long-run associations between the independent variables' central government debt, FDI, total debt service, and gross capital formation and real GDP per capita.

Research Findings: In the short run, all four independent variables exert a statistically significant influence on real GDP per capita. A 1% increase in total debt service corresponds to a 0.33% rise in real GDP per capita; an increase in central government debt results in a slight decrease of 0.001%; FDI exhibits a positive impact with a 1% increase leading to a 0.02% increase; while gross capital formation has a negative effect, causing a 0.004% decline. In the long run, FDI and gross capital...

Index Terms: ARDL Model • Economic Growth • foreign direct investment • Public Debt

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METADATA CONTINUATION

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FULL ABSTRACT

Research Aims: This study examines the relationship between Zambia's national debt and its economic expansion. Specifically, it investigates how central government debt, foreign direct investment (FDI), total debt service, and gross capital formation influence real GDP per capita over the period 1990 to 2020. **Design/Methodology/Approach:** An Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model estimated using EViews statistical software was employed. Annual time series data spanning 1990–2020 were sourced from the World Development Indicators (WDI) database maintained by the World Bank. The model examines both short-run and long-run associations between the independent variables' central government debt, FDI, total debt service, and gross capital formation and real GDP per capita.

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An Analysis of the Impact of Public Debt on Economic Growth in Zambia (1990–2020)

Aaron Chiwala*, Given Phiri, and Milambo S N Chiwala

Abstract

Research Aims: This study examines the relationship between Zambia's national debt and its economic expansion. Specifically, it investigates how central government debt, foreign direct investment (FDI), total debt service, and gross capital formation influence real GDP per capita over the period 1990 to 2020. **Design/Methodology/Approach:** An Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model estimated using EViews statistical software was employed. Annual time series data spanning 1990–2020 were sourced from the World Development Indicators (WDI) database maintained by the World Bank. The model examines both short-run and long-run associations between the independent variables' central government debt, FDI, total debt service, and gross capital formation and real GDP per capita.

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Keywords: ARDL Model, Economic Growth, foreign direct investment, Public Debt

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1 Introduction

The utilization of sovereign debt has become a crucial means of augmenting government expenditures. In situations where a government's spending surpasses its revenue, borrowing is commonly employed to bridge the gap. Government borrowing can be employed to facilitate critical development projects necessary for attaining economic expansion. This type of debt is categorized as either domestic pertaining to loans provided within a nation or external, pertaining to loans granted by foreign nations. Although public debt is recognized as a catalyst for economic advancement, critical issues remain, including determining the safe level to which national debt can be permitted to increase and devising plans for repayment.

Recent data indicate that the accumulation of governmental debt has risen in both less developed countries (LDCs) and advanced economies over the last few decades (Yusuf & Mohd, 2021). Rising debt levels can be attributed to an uptick in government expenditures, escalation in public investments, or a decline in tax revenue. A moderate amount of debt can expedite economic growth when employed to aid the development of public infrastructure (Yusuf & Mohd, 2021). However, some governments resort to unrestrained credit uptake since it is difficult to identify an optimal debt threshold, resulting in substantial interest

payments and a significant debt load that could adversely affect the economy, triggering excessive indebtedness (Joy & Panda, 2020).

Emerging economies can suffer severe ramifications from exorbitant debt volumes. Excessive debt not only hampers fiscal progress but also fuels uncertainty. The IMF emphasized the significance of keeping the debt-to-GDP ratio below 60% for both LDCs and developed economies. When this ratio reaches excessive levels, it can negatively affect stock markets, ultimately reducing enduring investment opportunities and prospects (Saungweme & Odhiambo, 2019).

Although borrowing can act as a catalyst for economic advancement, it can impede growth when it reaches excessive levels, as governments are obligated to make regular payments to service and settle obligations. These financial commitments reduce revenue and foreign reserves that could otherwise be utilized for alternative investment objectives. Public borrowing can generate enduring consequences throughout successive generations given the substantial tax responsibility needed to handle and resolve debt (Celestin, 2016). Consequently, using annual sequence data spanning 1990 to 2020, this research concentrates on how sovereign borrowing affects economic expansion in Zambia.

The issue of government borrowing is not a recent problem in Zambia and has persisted for several decades. In the 1980s, the country faced significant debt expenses, leading to economic sluggishness and

widespread impoverishment (Debt Justice, 2022). Zambia's debt burden began to decrease after 2005, when it attained Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) criteria eligibility, which required a US\$7 billion debt liability; the nation was able to eliminate US\$4 billion of debt through HIPC (Debt Justice, 2022).

Although Zambia made progress in reducing its debt burden, the nation has experienced an increase in debt levels over the last 12 years. According to the World Development Indicators (WDI), public debt increased from ZMW16.84 billion to ZMW344.51 billion between 2010 and 2020, while debt service increased from 0.8% to 23.1% (World Bank Open Data, 2026). With a peak of USD 2.1 billion in 2013, FDI inflows declined from US\$1.73 billion to US\$172 million from 2010 to 2020 respectively (World Bank Open Data, 2026). This deterioration can be partly attributed to concerns about the country's increasing debt burden and its ability to manage it effectively.

The impact of Zambia's increasing debt burden extends beyond the economy alone. The country's debt issues have also had social and political consequences, including widespread poverty and social unrest (Phiri et al., 2024). Furthermore, the increasing debt burden has led to concerns about the government's capacity to allocate resources

to essential areas like health and education, which are essential for sustainable development.

In the period under review, significant external factors that impacted Zambia's economy were the 2008 economic downturn and the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic. The severe impact of COVID-19 resulted in a struggling Zambian economy and caused the country to become the first in Africa to default on amortization payments, leading to a downgrade in Fitch's credit rating from CC to restricted default (RD) (Fitch, 2022). The default was specifically on three Eurobonds issued by the central government in 2012, 2014, and 2015, with valuations of US\$750 million, US\$1 billion, and US\$1.25 billion respectively (Kalikeka et al., 2019).

Figure 1 illustrates a growing propensity of sovereign borrowing as a proportion of GDP from 2010 to 2020, exhibiting a continuous debt-to-GDP upsurge from 17.3% in 2010 to a ten-year high of 103.7% in 2020. According to Bank of Zambia (2021), in 2020, foreign debt amounted to 82.3% of GDP, up from 50.2% in the preceding year. The majority of debt was provided by international organizations, commercial banks, and export creditors (Bank of Zambia, 2020).

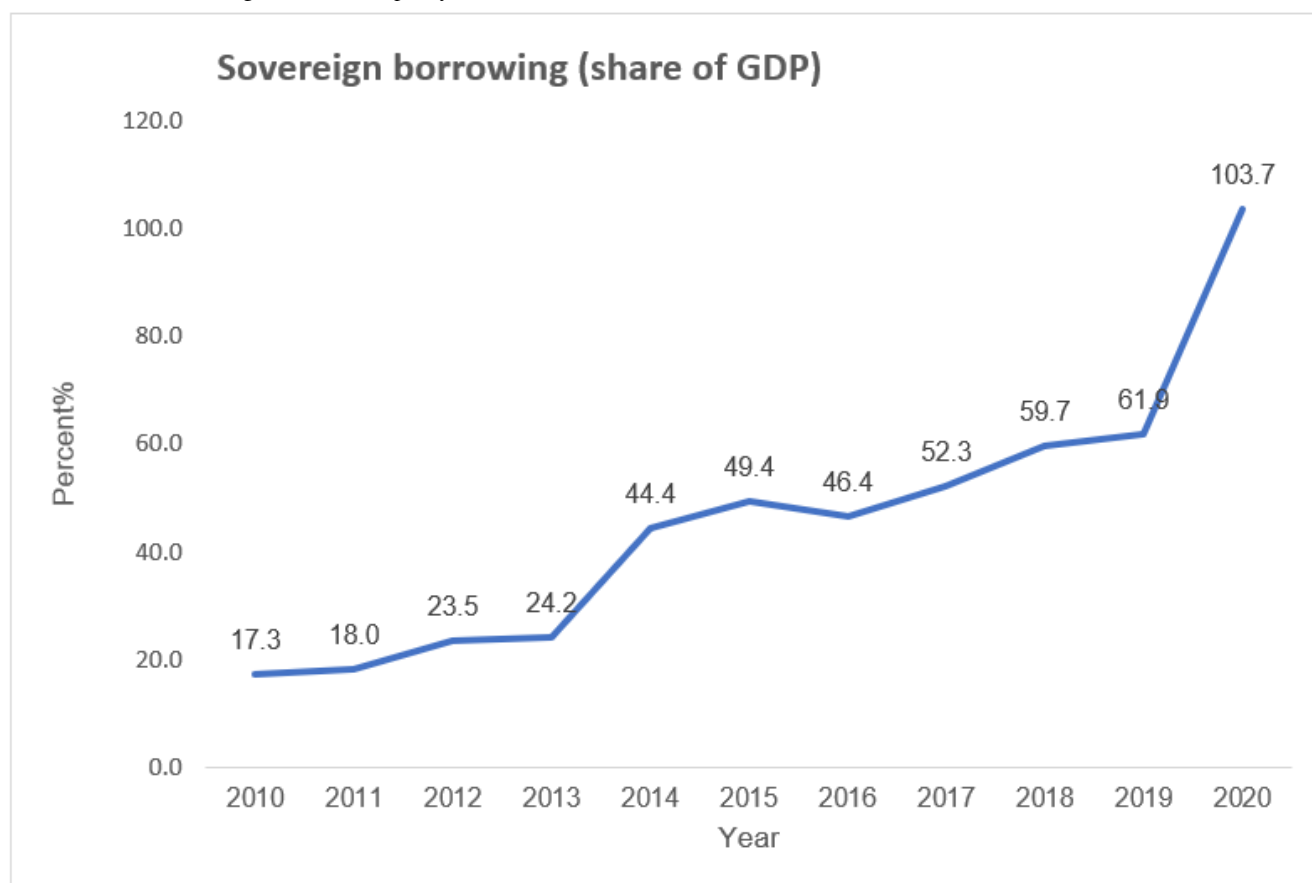


Figure 1. Zambia's Sovereign Borrowing (2010-2020)

Source: WDI of the World Bank (WDI, 2026).

The Zambian government must take appropriate measures to manage its debt effectively. One approach would be to prioritize investment in sectors with the potential to generate significant economic benefits, such as agriculture, mining, and tourism. Additionally, the government should implement effective debt management policies, negotiate favorable terms with creditors, and work closely with global organizations such as the IMF and World Bank to develop sustainable debt management

strategies. The previous government failed in its attempts to secure a debt bailout deal with the IMF. However, the current administration eventually secured the IMF Extended Credit Facility (ECF) deal following diligent efforts (IMF, 2022).

2 Literature Review

The studies by Thao (2018), Yusuf and Mohd (2021), Hilton (2021), and Chongo (2013) provide valuable insights exploring the influence of governmental borrowing on economic expansion and development. Utilization of different econometric models and data sources enhances the credibility of their findings and highlights the universality of the results.

Thao (2018) undertook an inquiry examining the affiliation between public debt and economic growth in six ASEAN countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) over the period 1995–2015. The analysis incorporated control variables including FDI, gross fixed capital formation, and the real effective exchange rate, employing General Method of Moments (GMM) estimation. The findings demonstrated a noteworthy and favorable influence of government debt on real GDP per capita growth in the ASEAN nations under study, with no detrimental effects of increased indebtedness on economic expansion discovered, challenging the conventional discourse regarding the negative consequences of government borrowing (Thao, 2018). The study proposes that the utilization of public debt to fund efficient public investments in the present phase of development facilitated long-term economic growth.

The research conducted by Yusuf and Mohd (2021) investigated the influence of government borrowing on Nigeria's economic growth over the period 1980–2018, utilizing the Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) procedure. The outcomes suggest that although external debt acted as an obstacle to long-standing growth, its immediate impact enhances growth. Conversely, domestic debt exhibited a substantial constructive effect on long-standing growth, whereas its short-term effect was negative. Debt service payments in both immediate and extended timeframes resulted in a slowdown in growth, affirming the presence of the debt overhang phenomenon. The results suggest that authorities must redirect borrowed funds towards strengthening the productive economic base to enhance development, diversify the income base, and increase capacity to meet loan repayment obligations (Yusuf & Mohd, 2021).

Hilton's (2021) investigation conducted in Ghana employed an ARDL Granger-causality model using yearly data from 1978 to 2018 to examine the causal connections between public debt and economic growth. The findings propose that in the short term, there is no causal relationship between public debt and GDP; however, in the long run, there is a unidirectional Granger causality from public debt to GDP (Hilton, 2021). Hilton's (2021) study further reveals a negative bidirectional causal association between investment spending and GDP in the short term, while in the long term they exhibit a positive bidirectional causal relationship.

Using the Vector Error Correction Model (VECM), Chongo (2013) studied the effect of rising sovereign debt on economic development from 1980 to 2008 in Zambia. A long-term inverse correlation between government borrowing and economic growth was identified. Furthermore, the presence of crowding-out and debt overhang effects is suggested by the influence of private investments and domestic savings, attributable to an increasing debt burden measured by both the ratio of public debt to GDP and public debt service to revenues (Chongo, 2013). These findings justify concerns about debt sustainability in Zambia and suggest that the government should be cautious in its borrowing practices to avoid further constraints on private investment and economic advancement.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Economic development is very broad and is affected by several interrelated aspects including inflation, unemployment, trade policies, and government regulations, among others. Therefore, the study's concentration on a limited number of variables might not offer a comprehensive comprehension of all elements propelling economic growth. The study focused on public debt, debt service, FDI, and capital formation due to the limited amount of time available and insufficiency of data on omitted variables. While the study anticipates a constructive effect of capital formation and FDI on economic development, it is essential to note that additional influences such as the quality of institutions, technological advancements, and human capital play significant roles in determining economic growth. The conceptual framework (Figure 2) illustrates the relationship between the independent variables (central government debt, FDI, total debt service, and gross capital formation) and the dependent variable (real GDP per capita).

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

A quantitative research approach was implemented to attain the predetermined objectives of this inquiry. The approach exclusively depends on numerical data to analyze the association between variables. A quantitative research approach is a scientific method used to measure and quantify variables using statistical analysis (Bell et al., 2022). This approach assumes that the world can be objectively observed and measured, and that numerical data can be used to identify patterns, trends, and relationships between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). One of the advantages is that it allows for the objective measurement of variables, which can increase the reliability and validity of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

3.2 Research Design

The research relied exclusively on quantitative analysis techniques to investigate the particular phenomenon. A correlational analysis was utilized to assess the relationship that exists among variables and to establish the strength and direction of this relationship. In this study, correlational analysis was used to determine the relationship between central government debt and real GDP per capita, using statistical software such as EViews and Excel to calculate correlation coefficients.

3.3 Target Population

The target population consisted of time series data aggregated from 1990 to 2020, sourced from institutions such as the World Development Index (WDI), Central Statistics Office (CSO) of Zambia, Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), African Development Bank (AFDB) Socio Economic Database, and the Ministry of Finance. These institutions provide annual observations for all variables: Real GDP per capita, Public Debt, Total Debt Service, Gross Capital Formation, and FDI. The study thus aimed to investigate the relationship between the variables of interest over a period of 31 years.

3.4 Sample Size

The sample size consisted of 31 annual time series observations for all targeted variables gathered from 1990 to 2020, derived from the CSO and WDI by the World Bank. Missing observations were addressed using data portals of the Ministry of Finance and COMESA. The researcher also employed interpolation and extrapolation methods to fill in some missing observations. The use of a large sample size is important for ensuring the reliability and validity of the results, as it allows for greater

statistical power and reduces the likelihood of sampling errors (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Independent Variables

Variable

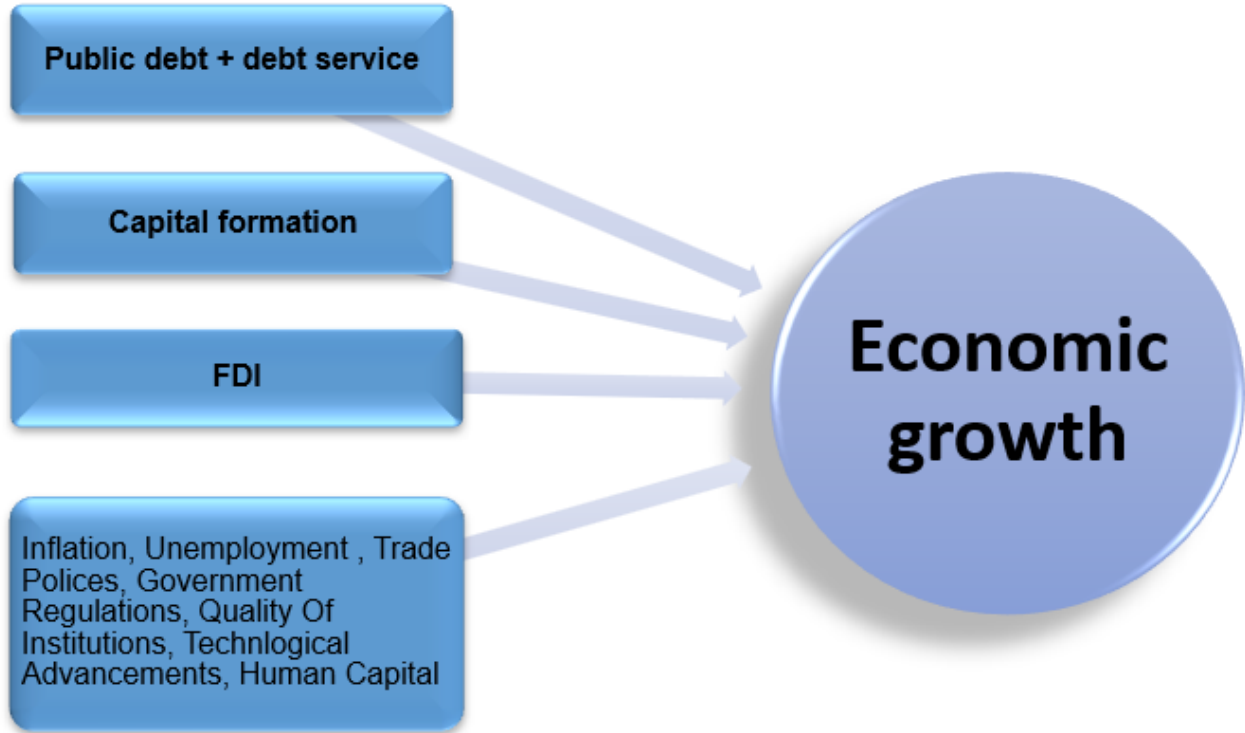


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

Source: Developed by the researcher (2023).

3.5 Data Collection

This study relied on a combination of secondary data sources. The researcher used the CSO and the World Bank's WDI as core data sources, with any missing data supplemented using COMSTAT and the Ministry of Finance. The World Development Indicators is a comprehensive database providing access to a wide range of socioeconomic indicators for nations worldwide, including Zambia. Data collection involved selecting specific indicators-Central Government Debt, Real GDP per capita, FDI, Total Debt Service, and Gross Capital Formation-for Zambia over the period 1990-2020. After downloading data in Excel

format, necessary cleaning and pre-processing steps were completed to verify data quality, including reducing outliers, filling in missing values, and standardizing the data structure. The study also incorporated secondary sources such as journal papers, published textbooks, and national reports to supplement the core data analysis.

3.6 Model Specification

The research aimed at evaluating how government borrowing influences economic progress by expanding the economic growth function. The base model is specified as:

$$GDP = TDS_t + CGD_t + \ln FDI_t + GCF_t \quad (1)$$

The ARDL model with error correction term is specified as:

$$\begin{aligned} \ln rGDP_t = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 TDS_t + \beta_2 CGD_t + \beta_3 \ln FDI_t + \beta_4 GCF_t + \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_{1i} \Delta TDS_t + \\ & \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_{2i} \Delta CGD_t + \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_{3i} \Delta \ln FDI_t + \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_{4i} \Delta GCF_t + \lambda ECT_{t-1} + e_t \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

The dependent variable is real GDP per capita ($\ln rGDP_t$), serving as a proxy for economic expansion. The independent variables are: GCF_t (gross capital formation as a proportion of GDP, indicating new capital investment internally), $\ln FDI_t$ (logarithm of FDI, indicating external capital influx), CGD_t (central government debt as a

proportion of GDP), and TDS_t (total debt service). The model was adopted because variables exhibit a combination of different orders of integration $I(0)$ and $I(1)$ series.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	LNGDPPC	TDS	CGDGDP	LNFDI	GCFGDP
Mean	7.586391	15.93984	106.9725	19.71894	26.10022
Median	8.075804	14.82415	103.6982	19.69308	24.90835
Maximum	9.772935	46.87526	277.5303	21.46511	45.39847
Minimum	2.690939	1.858138	17.32151	17.35066	10.96267
Std. Dev.	1.912723	12.18957	64.53635	1.151400	11.03113
Skewness	-0.942451	0.741789	0.639702	-0.325581	0.389297
Kurtosis	3.131720	3.016794	3.097277	2.309829	1.858517
Jarque-Bera	4.611516	2.843327	2.126518	1.162948	2.466040
Probability	0.099683	0.241312	0.345329	0.559074	0.291411
Observations	31	31	31	31	31

Source: Generated by the researcher using EViews (2023).

Table 2. ADF Unit Root Tests

Variable	Level t-Stat	5% Critical	P-Value	1st Diff t-Stat	5% Critical	P-Value	Conclusion
lnRGDPPC	-4.424	-2.981	0.0018	—	—	—	I(0)
TDS	-2.533	-2.964	0.1182	-8.672	-2.968	0.0000	I(1)
CGDGDP	-2.276	-2.964	0.1859	-6.377	-2.968	0.0000	I(1)
lnFDI	-1.942	-2.964	0.3100	-9.160	-2.968	0.0000	I(1)
GCFGDP	-0.110	-2.964	0.9390	-8.788	-2.968	0.0000	I(1)

Source: Generated by the researcher using EViews (2023).

3.7 Data Analysis

To estimate the model accurately, the researcher employed inferential analysis through the OLS technique, implemented with the aid of EViews statistical software. Before estimation, the Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) test for stationarity was conducted to prevent the possibility of nonsensical estimation outcomes arising from non-stationary data (Gujarati, 2004). Post-estimation tests including normality, autocorrelation, and heteroscedasticity tests were performed to test the reliability of the estimated model (Gujarati, 2004).

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the variables included in this study, generated by EViews using data collected from WDI. The logarithm of real GDP per capita (lnRGDPPC) is the dependent variable. The independent variables are: TDS (total debt service), CGDGDP (central government debt as a proportion of GDP), LNFDI (logarithm of FDI), and GCFGDP (gross capital formation as a proportion of GDP).

The mean and median values of the dependent variable, lnRGDPPC, are 7.586391 and 8.075804, respectively, suggesting that the average and median values of real GDP per capita during the study period fall within a similar range. The maximum value of 9.772935 and minimum of 2.690939 indicate considerable disparity in real GDP per capita levels in Zambia throughout the study timeframe. The high standard deviations for TDS (12.19) and CGDGDP (64.54) suggest large variation in total debt service and central government debt during the period. The Jarque-Bera probability values ranging from 0.099 to 0.559 suggest that the null hypothesis of normality cannot be rejected for any variable at the 5% significance level.

4.2 Unit Root Tests

Table 2 presents unit root test results for all five variables, generated by EViews using the Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) test. The ADF test is employed to determine the stationarity of time series variables. Stationary data exhibits consistent statistical characteristics over time,

while non-stationary data displays changing statistical properties as time progresses (Gujarati, 2004).

Based on the ADF test results, lnRGDPPC demonstrates stationarity at the 5% significance level, with a t-statistic of -4.424 falling below the 5% critical value of -2.981. Conversely, the variables TDS, CGDGDP, lnFDI, and GCFGDP exhibit non-stationarity at level but are stationary after taking their first differences, indicating first-order integration I(1). The combination of I(0) and I(1) variables justifies the use of the ARDL bounds testing approach.

4.3 ARDL Short-Run Estimation

Table 3 presents the short-run ARDL estimation results. The coefficient section presents the estimated coefficients for each explanatory variable. A p-value below 0.05 is deemed statistically significant, signifying a significant impact of the corresponding variable on the dependent variable.

Table 3. Short-Run ARDL Estimation Results

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	T-Statistic	P-Value
TDS	0.330683	0.056056	5.899173	0.0002
CGDGDP	-0.001045	0.000250	-4.176411	0.0009
lnFDI	0.021414	0.006579	3.254777	0.0058
GCFGDP	-0.003829	0.000698	-5.488638	0.0001
CointEq(-1)	-0.533300	0.042032	-12.68792	0.0000
R ²	0.930405			
Adj. R ²	0.901102			
F-Prob	0.000000			

Source: Generated by the researcher using EViews (2023).

4.4 Cointegration Test

The ARDL bounds test was employed to assess whether a durable correlation exists between the predicted variable and the set of predictors over the long term. The F-statistic obtained is 19.76987, which exceeds all critical values presented in Table 4, suggesting compelling evidence of a long-term relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable set.

Table 4. ARDL Bounds Test Critical Value Bounds

Significance	I(0) Lower Bound	I(1) Upper Bound
10%	2.20	3.09
5%	2.56	3.49
2.5%	2.88	3.87
1%	3.29	4.37
F-Statistic	19.76987	

Source: Generated by the researcher using EViews (2023).

Table 5. Long-Run ARDL Estimation Results

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
TDS	-0.002862	0.001164	-2.458797	0.0276
CGDGDP	-0.001960	0.000389	-5.037816	0.0002
LNFDI	0.040153	0.013981	2.871900	0.0123
GCFGDP	0.008484	0.001095	7.751442	0.0000
C	7.949829	0.294387	27.00471	0.0000

Source: Generated by the researcher using EViews (2023).

5 Discussion

5.1 Short-Run Results

The short-run ARDL estimation results indicate a significant influence of all predictors on real GDP per capita at the 5% significance level. A 1% increase in total debt service (TDS) corresponds to a 0.33% increase in real GDP per capita, holding other variables constant. This observed association between an increase in TDS and a rise in real GDP per capita finds support in the Debt Overhang Hypothesis, which posits that in the short run, increased borrowing can boost economic activity by increasing aggregate demand through increased spending (Dawood et al., 2024). When borrowed funds are channeled into productive assets or infrastructure, they can create jobs, increase demand for goods and services, and generate long-term economic benefits.

In contrast to TDS, a 1% increase in central government debt (CGDGDP) is associated with a 0.001% decrease in real GDP per capita. This finding is consistent with the Debt Crowding-out Theory, wherein an increase in government borrowing can lead to higher interest rates, crowding out private investment and reducing economic growth. However, this finding is not consistent with empirical evidence by Yusuf and Mohd (2021), who found a positive relationship between public debt and economic growth in the short run.

A 1% increase in FDI (lnFDI) is associated with a 0.02% increase in real GDP per capita. The neoclassical theory suggests that FDI can boost economic growth through the transfer of technology, knowledge, and management skills, leading to increased productivity and efficiency (Hayat, 2018). This positive short-run relationship is attributable to the spill-over effect of FDI on host country productivity. These theoretical arguments are consistent with empirical studies by (Borensztein et al., 1998; Thao, 2018; Xu & Wang, 2000) who found FDI to have a positive impact on economic growth.

A 1% increase in gross capital formation (GCFGDP) is associated with a 0.004% decrease in real GDP per capita. The negative short-run relationship may be explained by the crowding-out effect, wherein an increase in GCF could lead to higher interest rates, discouraging private investment and reducing aggregate demand (Eisner, 1971). This is consistent with findings by (Calderón & Liu, 2003; Devarajan et al., 1996) who found evidence of the crowding-out effect of GCF on economic growth.

The R-squared value of 0.93 indicates that the explanatory variables account for a considerable portion of the variation in real GDP per capita, and the adjusted R-squared of 0.90 confirms statistical significance. The coefficient for the error correction term CointEq(-1) is negative, significant, and less than one (-0.533), implying that approximately 53.33% of any deviations from equilibrium are adjusted for within one period.

5.2 Long-Run Results

The long-run ARDL estimation results suggest that independent variables have a significant impact on real GDP per capita. A 1% increase in TDS is associated with a 0.29% decrease in real GDP per capita in the long run. This result supports the debt overhang hypothesis, which suggests that excessive debt can have negative effects on economic growth in the long run (Krugman, 1988), and is supported by empirical evidence from (Yusuf & Mohd, 2021).

A 1% increase in central government debt (CGDGDP) is associated with a 0.002% decrease in real GDP per capita in the long run. This finding is consistent with the debt overhang hypothesis, as excessive government debt can lead to higher interest rates and lower private investment, hampering economic growth (Reinhart & Rogoff, 2010). This result is also corroborated by (Hilton, 2021; Yusuf & Mohd, 2021).

A 1% increase in FDI is associated with a 0.04% increase in real GDP per capita in the long run, consistent with the theory that foreign direct investment can stimulate economic growth through the transfer of technology, skills, and knowledge (Borensztein et al., 1998), and supported by (Thao, 2018). Finally, a 1% increase in gross capital formation is associated with a 0.008% increase in real GDP per capita in the long run, consistent with the theory that investment in physical capital leads to increased productivity and economic growth (Solow, 1956), and supported by (Thao, 2018).

6 Conclusion

The primary aim of this research was to evaluate how central government debt affects economic growth in Zambia, while also examining the roles of FDI, capital formation, and debt service. The ARDL estimation results confirm that all four independent variables (TDS, CGDGDP, lnFDI, and GCFGDP) had a significant impact on real GDP per capita at the 5% significance level. In the short run, a 1% increase in TDS corresponds to a 0.33% increase in real GDP per capita; a 1% increase in CGDGDP corresponds to a 0.001% decrease; a 1% increase in lnFDI corresponds to a 0.02% increase; and a 1% increase in GCFGDP corresponds to a 0.004% decrease. In the long run, the effects of TDS and central government debt become negative, while FDI and gross capital formation maintain positive effects on economic growth. All four null hypotheses that there was no statistically significant correlation between each independent variable and economic growth were rejected in favor of the respective alternative hypotheses, confirming the statistical significance of these relationships in both short-run and long-run timeframes.

These findings carry significant implications for policymakers in Zambia. The results demonstrate that an escalation in total debt service may be associated with short-term growth benefits but corresponds to long-run decline in real GDP per capita. Central government debt has a negative impact on economic growth due to the crowding-out phenomenon. Foreign direct investment consistently displays a positive association with economic growth, while gross capital formation exhibits a positive long-run relationship with economic growth.

6.1 Recommendations

Drawing upon the outcomes of this investigation, several recommendations can be put forth to ensure that each factor contributes favorably to the economic growth of Zambia.

Debt Management: The Zambian government needs to manage its debt levels carefully to ensure that the debt burden does not become unsustainable. The government could consider debt restructuring, debt forgiveness, or renegotiation of loan terms with creditors to reduce the burden of debt.

Encouraging Foreign Direct Investment: The government should create a favorable business environment through policies that promote transparency, stability, and predictability, and could provide incentives such as tax breaks, subsidies, or grants to attract foreign investors.

Encouraging Domestic Capital Formation: The Zambian government should encourage domestic capital formation through policies that promote savings, investment, and entrepreneurship, including tax breaks, subsidies, or grants for domestic investment.

Enhancing Debt Service Capacity: The government should take measures to enhance its debt service capacity by increasing revenue through taxation, diversifying the economy, and improving efficiency in public expenditure management.

Promoting Economic Diversification: The Zambian economy has been heavily reliant on copper exports, making it vulnerable to external shocks. The government should promote economic diversification in sectors such as agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, and services.

Improving Governance and Transparency: The government should strengthen institutions, promote accountability, and combat corruption through measures such as reforming public procurement processes, promoting freedom of the press, and strengthening the judiciary.

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Research Index

Technical concepts and key subjects are indexed at their verified discussion pages.

A

Abbreviations
ACTFL
ACTFL OPic
ARDL Short-Run Estimation
Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
also: APEC
Augmented Dickey-Fuller
also: ADF

B

Boccaccio

C

Central Statistics Office
also: CSO
Challenges
Cointegration Test
Collective Mental Health
Conceptual Framework
Conclusions
Creative Industries
Cultural and Creative Industries
Cultural Industries

D

Data Analysis
Data Collection
Descriptive Statistics
Development Challenges in Vietnam
Divorce
Divorced Women

E

Economic Growth
Economic Valuation
Egypt
Egyptian Divorced
Egyptian Institute for Studies
also: EIS
Epistemologies of the South
Extended Credit Facility
also: ECF

F

Federal Arbitration Act
also: FAA
Final Considerations

G

GDP in Japan
General Method of Moments
also: GMM
Gross Domestic Product
also: GDP

H

Heinrich Kaufringer
Highly Indebted Poor Country
also: HIPC

I

Information Needs

M

Marguerite de Navarre
Marie de France
Maximizing L2 Student Responses to Avatar Chatbots
Model Specification

O

Obscurity
Oral Proficiency Interview
also: OPI

P

Path Analysis
Profiling Egyptian Divorced Women's Information Needs
Public Debt
Purpose/Method

Q

Qualitative Research

R

Research Approach
Research Design
Rugby
Rugby Match Watching on Work Productivity
Rugby Watching
Rugby Watching and Work Productivity

S

Sample Size
Sampling
Social Return on Investment
also: SROI

T

Target Population
Territorial Amazonian Psychology

U

Unit Root Tests
Universal Design for Learning
also: UDL
University of Tennessee

V

Vector Error Correction Model

also: VECM	
Vietnam	
W	
Work Productivity	
World Development Index	
also: WDI	
World Development Indicators	

also: WDI	
World Health Organization	
also: WHO	
World Trade Organization	
also: WTO	
Z	
Zambia	

Author Guidelines

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