



The Educator

A JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MATTERS



mut
MALTA UNION OF TEACHERS

NO.8/2023



The Educator

A JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MATTERS



No.8/2023

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor-in-Chief:

Comm. Prof. George Cassar

Editorial members:

Marco Bonnici, Christopher Giordano

Design and Printing:

Print Right Ltd

Industry Road, Hal Qormi - Malta

Tel: 2125 0994

A publication of the Malta Union of Teachers

© Malta Union of Teachers, 2023.

ISSN: 2311-0058

CONTENTS

ARTICLES

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| A glance at a Librarian's Register
<i>Sergio Grech</i> | 1 |
| The effects of anxiety on ADHD
symptomatology in primary school students:
the impact on learning
<i>Anna Bugeja</i> | 11 |
| School Self-Evaluation: Process and Perspectives
<i>Angele Pulis</i> | 41 |
| A review of perceptions and expectations
of three major stakeholders towards virtual
learning in primary education in Malta
<i>Loren Mercieca and Simon Caruana</i> | 65 |

The Educator

A journal of educational matters

The objective of this annual, peer-reviewed journal is to publish research on any aspect of education. It seeks to attract contributions which help to promote debate on educational matters and present new or updated research in the field of education. Such areas of study include human development, learning, formal and informal education, vocational and tertiary education, lifelong learning, the sociology of education, the philosophy of education, the history of education, curriculum studies, the psychology of education, and any other area which is related to the field of education including teacher trade unionism.

This journal accepts articles from teachers, academics, administrators, graduate students, policy-makers, education specialists and any other author or researcher whose work contributes to the different facets of education and related areas.

It is the aim of ***The Educator*** to publish articles which cover particular dimensions such as:

- a. The integration of education with other academic disciplines including history, law, linguistics, anthropology, demography, philosophy, economics, psychology, political science, and sociology, among others.
- b. The examination of educational issues from a cross-cultural perspective.
- c. The inclusion of substantive findings that may be of help to policy-makers and practice.
- d. The examination of information technology in the field of education.
- e. The implementation of research methods and measurement processes which are clearly presented.
- f. The presentation of theories, models or conceptual frameworks in the field of education.
- g. The exposition of research findings derived from comparative and cross-national studies in education.
- h. The presentation and discussion of material derived from primary sources including archival documents, primary data and resource persons.
- i. Any other dimension which the editorial board deems compatible with the overall objectives of the journal.

Authors who are interested in having their work published in ***The Educator*** may contact the editor on **george.cassar@um.edu.mt**

A glance at a Librarian's Register

Sergio Grech

author's contact: Dr Sergio Grech - sergiogrech@yahoo.com

Following the Malta Labour Party's electoral success in the 1955 polls, the programme of school building and the extension of existing schools was intensified.¹ The Qrendi Primary School was built in the mid-1950s. The new school, built behind the village parish church, included "20 classrooms, an assembly hall, a library, offices and services."²

A librarian's register was recently found in the store of the Qrendi Primary School, which is part of St Benedict's College. The register covers the period from 6 October 1956 to 8 January 1971 and is an unpaginated document. Different calligraphies suggest that the library had various custodians in the referred period under study. The last two entries suggest that the library management had changed the way it kept its records.³

Presently, the Qrendi library is located within the premises of the Helen Keller Resource Centre. From the present primary school, one can easily proceed to the library as over the years the primary school was divided into two different schools. Before the resource centre was opened, the school also served as a secondary school for girls living in surrounding villages.

The person in charge of the library kept an attentive written record of the books borrowed and returned by the library's patrons. Their names and addresses were recorded. As his work demanded, the librarian also registered the date when the books were returned. Such details were scrupulously kept for every day that the library opened for business. At the time, there were no library cards for users.

It is interesting to note that titles of books started being recorded on the register on 22 August 1958.⁴ Instead of the titles, the custodian had previously registered an article number usually consisting of five digits. The addresses of the patrons were registered in English as the latter was the standard language of the bureaucratic machine.

On one or two occasions, the library custodian felt the need to register also the nickname (*laqam*) of the patron. For instance, one finds the nickname for Mary Ellul, Tal-Meylaq, a resident of Żurrieq Road, who borrowed a book from the library on 6 June 1962.⁵ The mentioned *laqam* is included in the list of nicknames published by Grech and Cassar (2019).⁶

Whilst leafing through the register, one gets the impression that it was a small lending library in a small village but with a regular, albeit small, clientele. In fact, according to the register, there were some dull days for the library's officer-in-charge since attendance was poor. Only two



Qrendi Primary School

patrons borrowed books on Saturday, 23 March 1957.⁷ The story repeated itself on 2 August of the same year.⁸ On 2 November 1960, only one user turned up and he chose the title *Paradox in Christian...*⁹ Once again, on 30 November, only one person borrowed a book at the library.¹⁰ The reader must bear in mind that we are speaking here of a small community. In 1967, Qrendi had a population of 2,099 inhabitants.¹¹ One should be aware that in the period 1949 – 1954, there were 300 Qrendin who chose to emigrate from Malta.¹²

The librarian also noted books that were lost by patrons although, to be fair, one must add that this was not a frequent occurrence. On 12 June 1968, the custodian noted that two books were lost by Sunta Briffa and Rose Briffa.¹³ These were *Ċensu Barbara* and *Hans Christian Anderson Fairy Tales*. Judging by the addresses supplied, these may have been mother and daughter.

The librarian also logged the dates when the library was kept closed owing to unforeseen circumstances. On Wednesday, 2 July 1959, the librarian recorded that "the library was kept closed as the Żurrieq custodian did not have the keys."¹⁴ This happened again on 19 July 1959.¹⁵ On 4 November 1959, the librarian noted that "the custodian failed to leave the keys and could not be traced."¹⁶

On the first day of operation, 6 October 1956, the library was used by thirteen persons residing in Qrendi; of these the majority were female patrons.¹⁷ Out of these thirteen, 3 patrons lived in Saviour Street, 4 in Tower Road, 5 in Żurrieq Road and 1 in St Nicholas Street.¹⁸

The impression one gets is that women used the library more than men although the custodian of the library does not reveal the ages of the patrons. Therefore, it is not easy to distinguish children from adults, although book titles might provide a valid indication in that respect. The library opened twice a week, on Saturdays and Wednesdays. But there were times when the library opened once a week. This was perhaps determined by the number of users over the years.

The register suggests that patrons could borrow up to two books and the impression one obtains is that, especially in the first years of service, the borrowing time was not fixed by regulations. For instance, the books that were loaned on 6 October 1956 were returned on the 17th, the 20th, the 27th and the 31st of the mentioned month.¹⁹ On the mentioned date, Nina Callus, Joe Galea and P. Zammit borrowed two books.²⁰ On 10 November 1956, only a month later, Mrs M. Zammit took home three books.²¹

Table 1: The number of books that were issued by the librarian over the years:²²

This was also a period when the concept of a reference section enabling patrons to consult a book in the library, had not yet been established. In fact, the librarian had loaned the *Bibliografija Nazzjonali*, a bibliographical dictionary penned by Robert Mifsud Bonnici, and a *Dizzjunarju*, though no details were given to indicate which one it was.²³ It could have been that by Dun Karm, published in 1951 – there were a number of copies of this *Dizzjunarju* in the library.²⁴

The register can help us to build a profile of library users. Some were quite avid readers. A very regular and punctual patron was Mr Paul Zammit whose name and address appear regularly and very frequently in the library's register. He was one of thirteen citizens who turned up on the library's opening day.²⁵ For instance, there were occasions when Mr Zammit, who resided in Tower Road, was the only

Oct 1956	125 books
Nov 1956	86 books
Dec 1956	85 books
Jan 1957	73 books
Oct 1957	41 books
Nov 1957	44 books
Dec 1957	40 books
Oct 1958	56 books
Nov 1958	54 books
Dec 1958	70 books
Oct 1959	46 books
Nov 1959	50 books
Dec 1959	35 books
Oct 1966	41 books
Nov 1966	51 books
Dec 1966	76 books
Oct 1967	58 books
Nov 1967	61 books
Dec 1967	68 books
Oct 1968	50 books
Nov 1968	31 books
Dec 1968	40 books

of the Kirkop Primary while being also an active member of the Lourdes Band Club of Qrendi.

Apart from the common persons who shared the pastime of reading, one can pinpoint from the register a few interesting names. A frequent user was Father Inspector Pace. Instead of the residing address, the librarian jotted down his profession, that is, Government Elementary School Inspector.²⁹ Police Constable John Scicluna, stationed at Qrendi's police station, used the library on two or three occasions.³⁰ On 23 January 1957, five books were loaned to Qrendi Primary School's Standard 5A.³¹ In the month of February, Dr A. Mercieca, the District Medical Officer serving in Qrendi, borrowed a book from the library.³² The D.M.O. "was resident in the district and was responsible for the health of the people of the district ... The DMO used to attend the village clinic (*berġa*) and visit the village school to examine the children."³³ Mr Godfrey Testa, described as an Elementary School Teacher, and who served in government schools, was a regular visitor of the library.³⁴ Another teacher who borrowed books from the library was Mr J. Micallef Grimaud,³⁵ while Miss Mary Ellul, a member of staff from Qrendi Primary also borrowed books from this library.³⁶ It is of note that even the watchman of the Qrendi school used the library and, thanks to the register, we know, for instance, that he read the book *Susanna* – a novel penned by Ġużè Muscat Azzopardi.³⁷ Miss Abela, also a teacher at Qrendi Mixed School, made use of this library as well.³⁸

Thanks to the register, we have a good idea of the type of books deposited in this library. These included publications in Maltese and in English, while it seems likely that there were more books in the English language. At this time there was no regular publishing house in Malta and this only became a reality in the 1970s with the establishment of Klabb Kotba Maltin and Merlin Library. Other ventures followed.

In some cases, there were multiple copies of the books that were on loan. We know this since two books bearing the same title were borrowed on the same day. Of course, it may also be that the library had available different editions of the same title. For instance, there were multiple copies of Ġużè Galea's *Id-Dinja Rota*³⁹ or Dun Frans Camilleri's anthology of verse *Mal-Milja ta' Qalbi*. For sure, there were multiple copies of the *Dizzjunarju*. Classics like *Oliver Twist*, *Robin Hood*,⁴⁰ *Black Beauty*, *Pinocchio*,⁴¹ *Treasure Island*⁴² and *Alice in Wonderland*, were popular with borrowers. Most probably these items were chosen by the student cohort.

Patrons' common choices included the novel *Ben Jeħuża*,⁴³ novels by Emilio Lombardi such as *Il-Forza tad-Destin*⁴⁴ and P.P. Saydon's translations of biblical books like *Ktieb Eżekjel*⁴⁵ and *Ktieb Isaija*.⁴⁶ Novels by Muscat Azzopardi like *Susanna* and *Nazju Ellul*⁴⁷ were also frequently borrowed. Ġużè Ellul Mercer's diary of the Second World War, *Taħt in-Nar*, was another popular title.⁴⁸ The same applies to Giovanni Curmi's *Riefnu*, yet another well liked book.⁴⁹



A day in the life of Qrendi Primary School –
a visit by Archbishop Mgr Charles J. Scicluna on 6th April 2016

Other titles in Maltese that were available in the library included *Antoloġija Dun Karm*, the novel *Aħna Sinjuri* by J.J. Camilleri,⁵⁰ Dijonisju Mintoff's translation of *Silas Mariner*,⁵¹ and Karmenu Vassallo's *Ħamiem u Srieq*.⁵² The series *Il-Mara Maltija* by Azzjoni Kattolika member and broadcaster Carmen Carbonaro was another popular title.⁵³ Gothic novels like *Il-Kastell l-Aħmar*,⁵⁴ *Nina l-Karkariża*, *L-Omm Ħatja*,⁵⁵ and *Ix-Xitan f'Parigi*,⁵⁶ written by L.N. Micallef, were also common titles borrowed by Qrendi residents. A further popular book was *Delitti ta' Wied iż-Żurrieq*.⁵⁷

A book that was often borrowed by the users of the Qrendi library was *Min iduq Ilmet in-Nil*.⁵⁸ This book consisted of twelve short stories and was published in 1937 by a community of Maltese living in Egypt. In fact, it was published by a Maltese printer, Mr A. De Giorgio, who owned a printing press in Port Said.⁵⁹ The book was edited by Anton Said.

It is hoped that this brief study has thrown some light on the reading habits of a small community at a particular time and space. The main document employed was the librarian's register, with all its limitations. It is probable that this article is a first of its kinds in many ways and may hopefully serve to stimulate further and deeper research towards the study of reading habits and library usage in past times as also what regards the management of the local and village libraries that were found in various schools across the Maltese islands.

References

The author would like to thank Ms Maria Zammit, Mr Carmelo Pace, Mr David Schembri, Mr Paul Busuttil, and Mr Chris Buttigieg for their help.

- 1 Zammit Mangion, J., 1992. *Education in Malta*. Malta: MAS, 68.
- 2 Cassar, G., 2014. *Qrendi: Its People and their Heritage*. Malta: Qrendi Local Council, 78.
- 3 During this period Joseph P. Vassallo, Saviour Gatt, Margaret Mortimer and George Mangion filled the role of Director of Education.
- 4 Qrendi Library Register [QLR], entry, 22.8.1959.
- 5 *Ibid.*, entry, 6.6.1962.
- 6 Grech, S. and Cassar, G., 2019. *Int minn ta' min Int?* Malta: Kunsill Lokali Qrendi, 24.
- 7 QLR, entry, 23.3.1957.
- 8 *Ibid.*, entry, 2.8.1957.
- 9 *Ibid.*, entry, 2.11.1960.
- 10 *Ibid.*, entry, 30.11.1960.
- 11 Cassar, 68,
- 12 *Ibid.*, 80.
- 13 QLR., entry, 12.6.1968.
- 14 *Ibid.*, entry, 2.7.1959.
- 15 *Ibid.*, entry, 18.7.1959.
- 16 *Ibid.*, entry, 4.11.1959.
- 17 *Ibid.*, entry, 6.10.1956.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 *Ibid.*, entry, 10.11.1956.
- 22 These figures were collated by the present author as no such statistics were reported in the register.
- 23 QLR., entry, 13.2.1960.
- 24 *Ibid.*, entry, 9.7.1960.
- 25 *Ibid.*, entry, 6.10.1956.

- 26 *Ibid.*, entries, 16.5.1962, 15.2.1962.
- 27 *Ibid.*, entry, 27.6.1964.
- 28 Communications with Chris Buttigieg and Maria Zammit, 18.10.2022.
- 29 QLR., entry, 10.10.1956.
- 30 *Ibid.*, entry, 12.12.1956.
- 31 *Ibid.*, entry, 23.1.1957.
- 32 *Ibid.*, entry, 9.2.1957.
- 33 Saliba, M., 2022. 'The Work of the District Nurse in Gozo in the Past,' *The Gozo Observer*, No. 45, 33.
- 34 QLR., entry, 10.7.1957.
- 35 *Ibid.*, entry, 21.5.1958.
- 36 *Ibid.*, entry, 9.2.1957.
- 37 *Ibid.*, entry, 26.9.1959.
- 38 *Ibid.*, entry, 29.1.1969.
- 39 *Ibid.*, entry, 8.3.1967.
- 40 *Ibid.*, entry, 21.1.1961.
- 41 *Ibid.*, entry, 4.2.1961
- 42 *Ibid.*, entry, 21.1.1961.
- 43 *Ibid.*, entry, 18.11.1959.
- 44 *Ibid.*, entry, 18.4.1970.
- 45 *Ibid.*, entry, 27.1.1960.
- 46 *Ibid.*, entry, 5.3.1960.
- 47 *Ibid.*, entry, 14.10.1959.
- 48 *Ibid.*, entry, 14.11.1959.
- 49 *Ibid.*, entry, 5.9.1959.
- 50 *Ibid.*, entry, 7.12.1966.
- 51 *Ibid.*, entry, 30.1.1971.
- 52 *Ibid.*, entry, 7.4.1962.
- 53 *Ibid.*, entry, 9.3.1960.
- 54 *Ibid.*, entry, 18.9.1964.
- 55 *Ibid.*, entry, 19.12.1959.
- 56 *Ibid.*, entry, 11.5.1963.
- 57 *Ibid.*, entry, 10.10.1959.
- 58 *Ibid.*, entry, 30.3.1960.
- 59 Grech, S., 2002. *Walter Zahra 1912-2003*. Malta: Wirt iż-Żejtun, 35.

The effects of anxiety on ADHD symptomatology in primary school students: the impact on learning

Anna Bugeja

author's contact: Ms Anna Bugeja - anna.bugeja.2@ilearn.edu.mt

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a common childhood neurodevelopmental disorder that is characterised by evident inattention and/or hyperactivity – impulsivity. It is generally comorbid with other disorders. Diagnosis is generally defined by the findings of the clinician, together with parents' and teachers' reports, which are fundamental for valid diagnosis where behaviours occur in more than one setting. Teacher reports are mainly necessary to get information on emotional, behavioural, peer relationships, academic performance, anxiety and academic issues at school (APA, 2014). Students with ADHD experience significant functional impairment and are more likely to experience mental health difficulties, including anxiety and depression, especially if a misdiagnosis or a late diagnosis takes place.

One approach to decreasing the occurrence of ADHD is to comprise a scrutiny of modifiable features within the child's environments (Nguyen et al., 2019). Difficulties with social functioning and learning difficulties impact the student's motivation and academical achievement, especially if the student is not met with the appropriate accommodations, instructions and interventions accordingly to his learning style, where a continuum struggle becomes evident (Peter, 2020). Academic achievements and assessment results have nowadays become key and are viewed as the foundation for the learner's career future and in society. It is foreseen that individuals who succeed in academics get a better position to guarantee the validity and endurance of the economic factor of the future leading social culture (Pinar, 2017). Hence, academic achievements are important from the primary years on, as when the learners achieve satisfaction, self-confidence and self-esteem develop. On the other hand, anxiety leads to lack of confidence, a threat to self-esteem which serves as a barrier in the sense of fear and failure (Eddine, 2016). Such difficulties in learners with ADHD include poor comprehension, failure to complete tasks, low grades, disruptive behaviour, peer conflict and violation of class rules (Raggi & Chronis, 2006). Furthermore, academic difficulties that these learners face during their adolescent years include risk of grade reduction, being segregated in special education classrooms and early dropout compared with their peers (McGilloway & Walen-Frederick, 2010).

Considering this, schools or institutes ought to serve as a community learning intervention with connotation for curricula where learners feel a sense of ownership and of belonging, and that would cater to their needs and their significant backgrounds (Borg & Mayo, 2006).

Inclusive opportunities and approaches for students with ADHD

The *Education for All: Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta Report* (Watkins et al., 2015) endorses that learning opportunities ought to be student-centred, as required by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), whilst it is important that educators advance further knowledge on supporting all students, particularly those with special educational needs (SEN). A flexible curriculum program should be implemented by liaising with all stakeholders, in order to assist students with teaching methods that engage learners in the mainstream class.

A Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools – Route to Quality Inclusion (MEDE, 2019) aims to cultivate a collaborative ethos among all stakeholders to increase the sense of belonging. As each child is unique, decisions by stakeholders must be taken for the benefit of the student in a happy, peaceful, caring and stimulating environment. This methodology aims to reduce the anxiety within the child to become an active learner.

When teaching, educators need not only practice the curriculum but also be empathetic towards children's social factors, their emotional literacy and their moral development. The environment designed for ADHD students must be able to positively affect the child's learning outcomes. Based on Bronfenbrenner's theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the school's environment influences the learner's academics and the subjective values which are meaningfully correlated to their emotional experiences (Liu, 2012; Frenzel, Pekrun & Goetz, 2007). The children hereby construct meaning and learning as they become influenced by their environmental factors. Thus, it is important that opportunities given to our students ought to be positively envisaged to accommodate quality education for all by minimising and preventing barriers to learning when attending to the unique needs of our students (Smit et al., 2020). The Social Model of Disability gives importance to the social, cultural and psychological influences of our learners (Nel et al., 2013).

Aim

The aim of this research is to look into what approaches impact the child's learning in the classroom, in tandem with parental situations that reduce or increase anxiety.

A literature review

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects and interferes with the brain function and the nervous system. It manifests in an individual's emotions, learning abilities, behaviour, self-control, motivation and memory; hence, it impacts the daily functioning of the individual in terms that are inconsistent with age-appropriate development, as well as impacting social and academical progress (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is characterised by changes in attention levels and activity levels, and/or difficulties in controlling behaviour, all of which lead to inattention, impulsivity or hyperactivity or a combination of these criteria, which are age-inappropriate and upsetting to self and to others (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2013). ADHD is the most common mental health problem in childhood (Polanczyk et al., 2007), which does not impair functioning as prominently when one reaches adulthood if the person learns how to cope with it (Rappley, 2005). However, McGilloway and Walen-Frederick (2010) note that there is an upsurge of adults that are now being late-diagnosed with ADHD. A substantial consideration is given towards the ethology of ADD/ADHD and its implications and consequences within the adults affected regarding being able to perform sufficiently in their educational and employment environments, as evidence supports the principle of a lack of executive functioning related with ADHD.

There are three profiles of ADHD that are defined in the DSM-V, based on the principle pattern of the past six months within the individual: i. The Combined Presentation (inattention and hyperactivity in addition to other conditions); ii. The Predominantly Inattentive Presentation; and iii. The Predominantly Hyperactive/Impulsive Presentation.

Whilst students with the Predominantly Inattentive Type have similar difficulties to the hyperactive type, they usually own 'quiet' characteristics and hence are not as disruptive, and thus they risk losing the benefit of early intervention, leading to the hindering of educational opportunities (Conolly et al., 1993). Since similarities between other comparable conditions and ADHD are insufficiently understood, these students typically receive support for ADHD relatively late in their academic occupations (Brown, 2014).

Comorbidities

Evidence has proven high levels of comorbidity between ADHD and other disorders, such as mood and anxiety disorders. Hence, ADHD is not a solitary homogeneous clinical issue, but presumably a group of

conditions with potentially different risk factors and outcomes (Spencer, 2006). Anxiety may in different ways affect peer relationships when compared to other students without ADHD. In other circumstances, such as in the Inattentive Type, social difficulties experienced by students with anxiety may arise due to shyness and withdrawal, whilst problems with the Hyperactive Type are more significantly attributed to intrusiveness and aggression (Mikami, et al., 2010).

It is estimated that a large percentage of individuals diagnosed with ADHD are also diagnosed with at least one other disorder (Cumyn et al., 2009). The high occurrence rates of comorbid issues, together with the applicability of ADHD in DSM-V criteria to symptoms noticeably across different disorders, encourage further research into misdiagnosis of ADHD, since numerous cases of misdiagnosis of ADHD have been found (Chilakamarri et al., 2011). Furthermore, studies report that about one third of those referred for an ADHD diagnosis do not become diagnosed with ADHD; however, they meet criteria for anxiety and personality disorders (Cumyn et al., 2009). This is due to severe phenomenological, behavioural and neurobiological differences between the two disorders (Abramovitch et al., 2012). The consequences of misdiagnosis of another disorder with ADHD in children results in repercussions due to the alleged negative impact, such as when prescribing medications for ADHD symptoms (Abramovitch, 2016) and when the wrong adaptations and accommodations within classroom settings are made.

ADHD and anxiety

Anxiety is noted as one of the most recurrent comorbid disorders in students with ADHD (Tannock, 2000). According to Schatz & Rostain (2006), learners with both ADHD and anxiety disorder are categorised otherwise than those students with only one disorder, either ADHD or just anxiety disorder. Moreover, Stefanatos & Baron (2007) argue that important characteristics of the underlying dysfunctions related to the two disorders may only be discovered in the child's natural environment. They claim that anxiety indications shield children in contradiction of poor inhibitory regulation. However, Abikoff et al. (2002) claim that the concept of anxiety disorder entails a consequence towards a behavioural dysregulation in learners with ADHD when referring to Gray's Model of Behavioural Regulation (Sørensen et al., 2010). It supports that children with anxiety disorder are hypersensitive towards reprimands, especially when behaviour is expected to be changed in new, different and challenging situations (Eysenck et al., 2007).

According to ICD-10, there are seven types of anxiety disorders, with generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), social anxiety and separation anxiety disorder (SAD) as most common in childhood. According to Kossowsky et al. (2011), SAD is one of the most common anxiety disorders amongst children, which is predictive towards further anxiety disorders in adults, such as panic disorder.

Evident indications of anxiety disorder are uncontrollable protuberant tension, fear, irrational worry, emotional state of uneasiness about day-to-day proceedings and difficulties with at least four indicators out of the following characteristics: palpitations, fast beating or accelerated heart rate, sweating, trembling or shaking and dry mouth that is not a consequence of medication side effects or dehydration. Excessive worry often interferes with daily functioning, particularly when students are required to present a positive image but doubt their ability to do so (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Such uncertainty may be driven by low self-worth and internalised shame (Gilbert & Procter, 2006). As a result these feelings can lead to a strong, unpleasant impact over social anxiety on personal identity, social relationships, mental health and success in education (Ameringen et al., 2003). Moreover, Bagwell et al. (2006) claim that children with ADHD who establish externalised challenging behaviour and/or social difficulties in childhood are more expected to have anxiety and depressing issues during adolescence.

Diagnosing ADHD in children and early intervention

Professionals diagnose ADHD in the primary years after a child has demonstrated six or more symptoms on a regular basis for a minimum of a six-month period in two or more settings. Clinical professionals diagnose the condition upon the standard guidelines of the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). It comprises data collected from the home environment by caregivers and from the educational placement by educators. The clinical professional takes into consideration the individual's behaviour, comparing it to others of the same age, using standardised rating scales to establish the frequency and to document such behaviour issues (WebMD Editorial Contributors, 2019).

When a diagnosis is issued in the early stages, the child benefits from early intervention support. As ADHD is caused by genetic and/or environmental factors, an early intervention programme focuses on modifying the underlying neurophysiology in a long-term change as the foundation for teaching skills, whilst allowing the brain to process new knowledge, at a time when the brain plasticity is still developing (Maniadaki, 2020).

Late diagnosis

ADHD is more problematic to diagnose in adults. Occasionally, the adult involved will identify the indications of ADHD in themselves when their own children are diagnosed, as it is recognised that ADHD is genetic (Dan, 2016). In other circumstances, they seek professional advice against anxiety, depression or other symptoms correlated to ADHD (Bhandari, 2019). McGilloway and Walen-Frederick (2010) claim that there is an increase of adults that are being identified with ADHD as it is publicly documented as a valid disorder into adulthood. Hereby, clinicians encounter difficulties when issuing the diagnosis such as in the phase of commencement criteria and the limits of five symptoms in at least two settings, as the declaration is stated by the individuals themselves and not as seen by others. Furthermore, adolescents with ADHD forget their symptoms from childhood (Segenreich et al., 2007). Considering this, Mordre et al. (2011) highlight the importance of not missing out early interventions in childhood, as then adults become more at risk of conduct disorder. According to Dan (2016), acceptance of the concept that the inception of psychopathology is constructed in early childhood development means that ADHD must be acknowledged and treated in early childhood to avert forthcoming developmental issues.

Misdiagnosis

According to Abramovitch (2016), a conflicting profile between ADHD and other disorders challenges the feasibility of an authentic and realistic comorbidity. He states that there is a deficiency in the aetiological accounts for comorbidities. The repercussions of misdiagnosis of other conditions like ADHD in children may be distressing due to an alleged negative influence, such as the inappropriate support given, both in the clinical and education sector (Abramovitch, 2016). Clinical professionals render caution when examining a possible dual diagnosis of ADHD and a comorbid condition. Moreover, Schwandt and Wuppermann (2015) claim that while European countries identify many children who are diagnosed with ADHD at a relatively young age, many are potentially misdiagnosed due to their immaturity level.

Yaman and Sökmez (2020) claim that giftedness renders children risking social disability, where social exclusion, emotional issues and withdrawal indications are noticeable, both at school and other environments. Risk and protective factors concerning social-emotional issues are stressed due to asynchronous development, sensitivity, labelling, high expectations, shyness and introversion (Robinson, 2008). These indications are often

contributed to the misdiagnosis of social and emotional disorders such as ADHD, SEBD, anxiety disorder, oppositional defiant disorder and depression.

Diagnostic labelling

According to the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), inclusive schools accomplish achievements if the child with SEN becomes identified from the early stages on, so that with appropriate accommodations and modifications we intervene adequately to support the child's intellectual and social needs from the foundation of their educational placements towards their school readiness for further development. Professionals claim that when a label, such as 'ADHD', is given to a diagnosed child, it is important for other professionals, such as for the multidisciplinary team and the professionals involved in the education sector, to manage and contribute their expertise towards that pupil. Disability labels, despite being inevitable due to the child's (sometimes) apparent condition/s, are beneficial to prevent worsening the condition when adequate programmes are designed and implemented. Children with emerging characteristics may develop a belief that they are meant to be unsuccessful due to their condition (Bokhari, 2020). Labelling can be accommodating, as professionals can support both the children and their carers to comprehend the difficulties and give supplementary access to support in school (Moore, 2017).

Unfortunately, our students do not receive the support of an LSE without a label. This label may also lead to stigmatisation by peers; hence it may impact the learner's behaviour (Bailey & Thomson, 2009). Henceforth, it is imperative to apply 'people first' language towards our students, by seeing the person before the disability, so that respect becomes established, and devaluation, marginalisation and prejudice are eliminated.

Teaching and learning

Giving importance to students with SEN who are following an age-appropriate curriculum in a mainstream classroom is recognised in terms of designing learning settings which take diversity into consideration from the early years (Lapinski, Gravel & Rose, 2012), and in terms of including the child in the same circumstances as peers (Spratt & Florian, 2015). When teaching students with ADHD, teachers can implement opportunities that focus on the challenges of ADHD. Each child is unique and has their own learning style, which determines how the students obtain and process their learning. Developing an adaptive learning approach by

applying Gardner's (1983) multiple intelligences, supports adaptations and modifications whilst reinforcing the individual's learning. Gardner projected the theory of multiple intelligences in 1983 and recommended that traditional IQ tests were biased or incomplete. A traditional or one-size-fits-all learning system provides minimal consideration for specific learners, hence not motivating nor encouraging learning, whilst failing to deliver diverse instructions towards differing learning styles (Lee & Oh, 2013). When the diversity of learning environments derives from an educational change, students benefit, as this scenario accommodates an active role in educational practices which can be tailored to their preferences.

When educators become considerate towards the learners' styles, it is important to determine which appropriate approach/es and techniques should be implemented to address the necessities of various intelligences (Allen et al., 2010). It is evident that there is a connection between ADHD and academic underachievement. As Raggi & Chronis (2006) claim, the main behavioural indicators of ADHD and of executive functioning deficits are possibly involved in low academic performance. Treatment against ADHD, such as medication, classroom behavioural interventions and clinical behaviour therapy, has had a major impact on attention and on challenging behaviour within the classroom settings; nevertheless, their effectiveness in improving academic achievements efficiently depends on the individual and the stakeholders. Delivering the appropriate strategies and interventions is beneficial to preventing social issues and early-age school dropouts at a later stage (McGilloway & Walen-Frederick, 2010). However, as Gable et al. (2012) argue, teachers are not always executing instructional approaches that support students with emotional and behavioural disorder (EBD) and ADHD, resulting in unsatisfactory social and academic consequences.

Hence, different teaching styles may impact positively or negatively the way students feel. This then leads to effective or ineffective learning (Felder & Henriques, 1995). ADHD students require motivating accommodations towards an equitable learning process that respects inclusion; thus, it is recommended that teaching strategies are delivered accordingly (Cadagan & Garrido, 2016). Educational instructions require good communication and cognitive, sensory, emotional and social skills.

Furthermore, these approaches enhance the growth of classroom management, whilst educators can manage effectively the daily circumstances such as conflict, tasks and groupworks, while motivating all students and providing feedback. Educators own the opportunity to

be influential by redirecting a losing year into a persuasive one, where the students' full potential can be achieved while they advance and scaffold their existent knowledge and develop their critical thinking (Cadagan & Garrido, 2016).

This methodology encourages the students to become enthusiastic towards acquiring further educational information and become skilled in achieving learning competence in a supportive environment and a thoughtfully equipped learning setting, based on a constructivist learning theory in the classroom (Lombardi, 2011). In Vygotsky's constructivist theory, when students are engaged as active learners, they construct additional knowledge onto the previous knowledge acquired in a directed environment. As in Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979), our students are in the ecological mesosystem and become affected by their school environment. Such an environment encourages the importance of relationships within a society where connections that become established influence the students' development (Elfer et al., 2018).

Teaching students with ADHD in a UDL approach

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is beneficial to reducing the existent barriers in education where the diversity in a mainstream class is appreciated. UDL is increasingly evolving in the educational sector as it brings development and restructuring that engages and celebrates the diversity of all learners. Moreover, it also leads to the social conception where all students are given equitable opportunities to achieve learning and to thrive successfully.

Harn et al. (2013) declare that teachers ought to give priority to the application of practices that are designed so that the diverse needs of SEN learners can be met. Teachers establish the goals for the learners and reflect on strategies and resources to engage students so that the learning outcomes become manageable. Moreover, offering choices according to the students' learning styles is imperative to success. The UDL approach aims that learners are provided with variant approaches to acquire knowledge. They comprehend information in multiple ways as it is presented to them. Addressing the needs of all students in a mainstream class by presenting the subject material according to their learning augments the learning outcomes, specifically for those students not comfortable in the present system, namely marginal students, students with disabilities/learning difficulties and the gifted/high achievers (Ragimova, 2014). This student-centred approach delivers the opportunity for all students in class to access, participate in and develop

the curriculum by decreasing barriers to instruction, hence all students are engaged, and representation is delivered in multiple ways so that each student benefits according to their dispositions. To scaffold the students' knowledge, action and expression are provided. The educators can assess what each student has learned, not necessarily on written paper; not one size fits all, but through various informal active and expressive meanings (National Curriculum Framework, 2012).

Applying a UDL approach, teachers can coordinate opportunities for engagement and self-regulation. The UDL guidelines address engagement by increasing connections and collaboration, providing professional feedback and simplifying the expected skills. When such criteria are met, students learn how to self-monitor, hence anxiety becomes reduced (Cook et al., 2017).

Relationships

According to Moore et al. (2017), relationships with individuals with ADHD are regularly challenging and behaviour issues in children with ADHD often impact their relationships with parents, siblings, educators and peers due to their maladaptive behaviour, as they encounter difficulties in building and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Hoza et al., 2005; Kauffman & Landrum, 2013). They also experience academic problems (Tais, n.d.). Professionals advocate that relationships which ADHD learners own are of key importance to their achievements and success, not only within the classroom environment but also in social skills in general settings. Emerging relationships for learners with ADHD have an important teaching role beyond academics in assisting students to become successful as they enhance their self-esteem. Hence parents and educators are required to comprehend the ADHD characteristics as it is fundamental to establish better relationships between stakeholders and learners with ADHD to manage intervention experiences in academics (Ljusberg, 2011). The relationships that children with ADHD possess with others are commonly described by caregivers as interchangeable yet exhilarative (Moore, 2017). According to Graziano et al. (2011) the ADHD Combined Presentation Type is significantly related to anxiety according to parenting statements, together with tension caused by emotional negative reactions, executive functioning and comorbid aggression indicators. Consequently, children with ADHD Combined Type have higher phases of emotional lability, frustration, aggression and executive functioning problems.

Educators claim that when positive peer relationships become established, students are able to work and interact together with individuals of various

natures. Hence social skills are given priority so that teaching approaches and interventions result in recognised effectiveness (Moore, 2017).

Data analysis

This section deals with the analysis of data resulting from the interviews regarding the phenomenon of interest. From an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), interviews conducted with parents (P1 and P2), educators (LSE1, LSE2 and TCH) and an educational psychologist practitioner (EPP) revealed subjective experiences of children's anxiety in relation to ADHD symptomatology and its impact on their learning.

ADHD symptomatology in primary school students

According to the way that the DSM-V defines characteristics to diagnose ADHD criteria, this neurodevelopmental condition interferes with the brain function and the nervous system. All participants expressed concerns in the children's behaviour, emotions, motivation, learning difficulties and anxiety.

Characteristics of ADHD that interfere with learning

Addressing research question number 3, the selected participants were purposely chosen to examine the children's behaviour in different settings to compare if the child behaves similarly or differently, since when a child is referred for a clinical assessment it is important that collecting data takes place following observations in different environments, such as at home and within the educational placement. In doing so, it is useful to consider the relationship between parents, educators and the EPP's concerns of students in primary schools (Halldner et al., 2014). All educators and the EPP highlighted the importance of observations.

Externalised behaviour

LSE2 highlights the most noticeable of behaviours as the Hyperactive Type in an externalised behaviour.

According to Reynolds & Kamphaus (2013) such characteristics are that these students are restless, become irritable and out of control during outbursts, they rock a lot, are disruptive and are constantly fidgeting and crying at a younger age. This is also stated by P1 while describing her son in the early primary years as extremely difficult, he would be screaming, running about and crying. (P1)

Moreover, LSE2 states that at times aggression occurs, where these children are of harm to self and to others. Additionally, P2 confirms that her son does not have any sense of danger.

Internalised behaviour

LSE1 claims that students with ADHD exhibit different types of behaviours, which “all depend on the severity of the condition”. P1, LSE1 and EPP also highlight the internalised behaviour where the students do not exhibit any type of overt feelings. Such characteristics are withdrawal, inattention, insecurity, being off-task and refraining from speaking up (Mikami et al., 2010).

This lack of engagement and participation requires the support of educators to develop opportunities to decrease barriers, whilst representation needs to be delivered in various ways according to the child’s needs through active and expressive meanings (National Curriculum Framework, 2012).

Emotions and motivation

Regarding this theme all six participants stressed the importance of the children’s emotions when they cannot cope with academic tasks. The result is that anxiety is established through a burden as the child “cannot do it”. This occurs both at school and at home. TCH explains that academic expectations are putting a lot of pressure on the child as they are aware of the difficulties, they feel that they cannot cope, but still would like to challenge themselves and to be able to do what is expected, just like their peers, by putting in extra effort. This is also expressed by both P1 and P2, where, despite that both children were struggling to fit in the class curriculum, concurrently they found it frustrating, hence more anxiety was created. P1 and P2 claim that due to their children’s insecurity their anxiety levels increase. In contrast, LSE1 believes that even though ADHD students can work on required tasks, they demonstrate denial and low self-confidence. This lack of self-confidence becomes a threat to self-esteem, negatively affecting performance and creating a sense of anxiety and failure (Eddine, 2016).

Importance is given to empathy by LSE1 and LSE2. Educators need to understand their students, as through comprehension they will ameliorate their emotions. When teaching, educators must not only implement the curriculum but also be sensitive to the child’s social factors, emotional competence and moral development.

We need to place ourselves in the student's circumstances to try and understand their situation. That way maybe even gives better guidance and support, makes the student trust you, which is very important, as it's only then they will express. (LSE2)

It is also noticed by LSE1 and LSE2 that the educators' voice tonality influences the students' emotions. It is important to remain calm, as this impacts students' motivation and their learning to work on further tasks. When these children become motivated they will be able to learn and retain information.

I feel that it is highly important as if the student is anxious, it is difficult for them to learn and retain information. When they have an LSE, this calms the student and will help them be able to focus more and accomplish to do more tasks like others. (LSE2)

Referring to research question number 5, according to Peter (2020) the difficulties encountered with learning impact the student's motivation and academical achievement and a continuum struggle becomes evident. Both P1 and P2 discussed experiences when in previous years accommodations and modifications were not designed by educators, the children were expected to work concurrently with the class, but due to their learning difficulties they could not cope. Frustrations caused further anxiety; hence, motivation was discouraged.

As McGilloway & Walen-Frederick (2010) argue, if academic difficulties worsen into their teens, children with ADHD risk lower grades, segregation into special education classes and higher early school dropout rates compared to their peers. The EPP also states that it is noticeable that these students, due to the difficulties they encounter, "drift away from school in their teenage years". (EPP)

Learning abilities and working memory

Difficulties of learners with ADHD include poor comprehension, failure to complete tasks and poor grades, hence disruptive behaviour occurs due to augmented anxiety (Raggi & Chronis, 2006). Both P1 and P2 established concerns about their children's executive functioning: the children are forgetful and encounter difficulties in concentration, organising, starting and finishing tasks and distinguishing between matters. For example, P1 mentions that the child cannot distinguish between earlier and later, whilst P2 claims that her child finds resistance to learn literacy, especially in comprehension tasks, despite being very intelligent and having above

average IQ. All educators claim that repeating explanations is beneficial to supporting memory. Moreover, TCH gives importance to the amount of support given, so that achieving independency will not be hindered.

Despite the support provided by the LSE, P1 states that the child still struggles with memory and is aware of his difficulties. He also requires that instructions are broken down.

Working memory, organisation and time-concept

According to Paepe & Langerock (2012) increasing the time during which attention is required in a concurrent processing activity whilst holding constant the time available leads to lower retrieval outcome. It was observed for both verbal and visuospatial memory, interfering with processing and storage of information and causing issues of forgetting (Alloway et al., 2006). According to EPP, clinically examining the working memory gives an estimate of short-term memory, attention and concentration, thus making it difficult to allow new learning from happening. Whilst most ADHD students are intelligent, they are unable to keep organised. They are procrastinators as they cannot focus, and keep postponing duties, leaving responsibilities for the last minute. Their disorganisation results in a lack of coping skills.

This is also stated by P2, whose child has above-average IQ. When doing homework his procrastination became evident. As a result, he wastes time and does not finish tasks as stipulated. Moreover, the parent states that the child was more disorganised when younger, but because he is learning coping skills, organisation is improving. On the other hand, P1 states that it is only with support that the child finishes tasks on time, and that timing is problematic.

EPP pointed out that due to ADHD disorganisation occurs and interferes with everyday life. For example, students cannot find their belongings or these become piled up. Such symptoms create anxiety, such as not remembering if a task was done or not and not starting and finishing tasks on time. This excessive worry often interferes with daily functioning, especially when students are expected to present a positive image but doubt their ability to do so (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). This issue is noticed more in girls than in boys.

As society expects girls to be organised more than boys, they are expected to be attentive and to pay attention to detail. They are expected to be calmer and less panicky, whereas girls with ADHD cannot do that. (EPP)

This creates low self-esteem and internalised shame (Gilbert & Procter, 2006). As in Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979), our students become affected by society. Should opportunities in an empathetic environment be denied, learning does not occur as it also discourages the importance of relationships (Elfer et al., 2018).

Diagnostic labelling for inclusion

As described above, EPP highlights that gender also makes a difference. While in boys such behaviours are overt and more visible, in girls they are more emotional and anxiety occurs more commonly. Girls are less likely to be referred for a diagnostic opinion than boys, so boys are more likely to receive services than girls (Bauermeister et al., 2007). As students of the Inattentive Type become overlooked they receive support for ADHD relatively late (Brown, 2014).

Diagnostic labels outline the children's disorders or difficulties and aid improved understanding. Establishing a condition such as ADHD means that parents gain knowledge and seek help to improve the situation, which provides supplementary access to support in school (Moore, 2017).

It is noted by the EPP that referral requests for a statement are mostly done by educators in State schools, whilst in the private sector it is the parents who seek a diagnosis following a suggestion by the educators. One of the reasons is due to the noticeable externalised behaviour which becomes difficult to handle in the classroom and with their peers (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2013), so the support of an LSE in class becomes required. The EPP states that educators have an important role as nowadays they are becoming more knowledgeable in ADHD, as recommended in the *Education for All: Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta Report* (Watkins et al., 2015).

Time of diagnosis and the impact on learning

When interviewing EPP in relation to this study's research item EPP ethically suggests that children become diagnosed with ADHD around the age of six, as prior to this age it is normal that the child is still fidgety and inattentive. An early diagnosis, although giving tranquillity to the parents, could easily lead to a misdiagnosis. Schwandt and Wuppermann (2015) claim that in European countries many children diagnosed with ADHD at a relatively young age may be misdiagnosed due to their immaturity. This confirms EPP's statement that children are still emotionally illiterate at an early age and are unable to express their thoughts or feelings. P1

experienced this, as although the child was diagnosed at Kindergarten age, a misdiagnosis occurred.

P1 recounts that she wanted assurance that the child will be supported following an early diagnosis; however, she recounts the misdiagnosis situation as 'frustrating'. What kept the parents calm was that "at least some support was given to the child"; however, it ended up being inappropriate and not as expected (Abramovitch, 2016), hindering the expected progress whilst increasing the child's anxiety to an extent that the child demonstrated school refusal.

On the other hand, P2 discussed that her child was diagnosed at the age of seven. Although she claims that she wished that the process had occurred earlier, diagnosis at that age brought relief to the family, even though it was difficult for them to accept. The diagnosis led to accommodation in the classroom, where educators gave it priority so that the diverse needs of the student be met (Harn et al., 2013), directing challenging performances, helping the child and the parents to understand the difficulties, and providing additional access to support in school (Moore, 2017).

Moreover, EPP states that when a diagnosis is issued, administering the proper medication is beneficial, even though parents are sceptic. Diagnosis and treatment of students with ADHD bring significant relief to the student and their family members in relation to their impact on behaviour rather than on learning.

Diagnostic Anxiety Disorder

While EPP was being interviewed the respondent mentioned that due to the difficulties interrelated with ADHD and learning difficulties, sometimes this group of people also develop anxiety disorder, although in primary school-aged children it is only considered as anxiety and not as anxiety disorder. In this scenario ADHD and anxiety are comorbid. Anxiety develops as the children are aware of their difficulties. This is also stated by both P1 and P2, where their children aged nine and ten are aware that they "are different from their peers". They become anxious each time they are required to work on tasks, during a show and tell presentation and during assessment periods.

Subsequently, when clients requested an ADHD assessment and it was noticed by EPP that the child was crying, trembling and needed breaks, these observations paved the way from ADHD to generalised anxiety disorder (GAD). As studies mentioned above report, about one third

of those referred for an ADHD diagnosis do not become diagnosed with ADHD; however, they meet the criteria for anxiety and personality disorders (Cumyn et al., 2009). Moreover, DSM-V confirms that anxiety disorders in adulthood are recognised from childhood.

Kossowsky et al. (2011) argue that separation anxiety disorder (SAD) is one of the most common anxiety disorders amongst children, which also applies in the case of LSE1, as she observes that the child cries when separated from the mother upon school admission. P1 also discussed this as GAD as she claims that it is due to this fear that these children feel as they cannot cope with the school environment. Furthermore, both P1 and P2 claim that changes bring fear, hence both children prefer the comfort of their own room due to insecurities. In Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1982) attachment is characterised by behavioural and motivation patterns. As these children are insecure or frightened, they seek shelter and comfort from their primary caregivers (Cherry, 2019).

The environment

EPP, P1 and P2 claim that the children feel safer at home as less fear is demonstrated. EPP observes different levels of anxiety between home and school. Anxiety is still evident at home, as it is noticeable when the children are working on tasks and playing games. They establish uncertainty as when asking repeatedly if they are doing 'it' right. At school anxiety is more apparent due to the continuous stimuli and rules (Raggi & Chronis, 2006). ADHD children feel uncontrollable, occasionally resulting in tantrums or meltdowns. EPP metaphorically explains the situation.

Both P1 and P2 reported experiences when in previous years the children did not receive adequate support in class. In these situations their anxiety levels led them to school refusal.

The Social and the Medical Model of Disability

Adhering to the Social Model of Disability gives meaning to the social, cultural and psychological influences of our learners (Nel et al., 2013). Regretfully this is not always respected. As a researcher of a qualitative study it is observed that it is difficult to distinguish between the impact of impairment and the impact of social barriers (Watson, 2002). P1 emphasises the difference between a diagnosis and a label. Whilst a diagnosis positively allowed a scaffolded approach as something concrete to work on, the respondent revealed that she had encountered negative labelling such as 'finger-pointing'.

Similarly EPP admits that all children are given a label, irrespective of whether they are diagnosed or not.

This goes against the principle of valuing empathy introduced by LSE1 and LSE2. Educators need to understand their students, as through comprehension their emotions will improve. When teaching, educators must not only implement the curriculum but also be sensitive to the child's social factors, emotional competence and moral development.

EPP continues that this issue also occurs at home when parents are in denial of the diagnosis. This creates anxiety, as when the child is to blame for the difficulty the child feels less of a person and has a feeling of "not good enough. The child also establishes a guilt feeling. It ruins top priorities, it ruins academic opportunities, it affects a lot" (EPP). Due to this, children with ADHD Inattentive Type become overlooked and receive support relatively late (Brown, 2014), and this is due the parents' resistance to seek professional advice, whilst labelling the child.

In contrast P1 states that when educators allow meaning to the educational and emotional stimuli of the learner (Nel et al., 2013) and not see it as 'the condition', the child does not demonstrate resistance, nor anxiety. This occurs when the Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools – Route to Quality Inclusion (2019) is implemented so that the child belongs in a happy, peaceful, caring and stimulating environment.

Therefore it is essential to apply People First Language towards our students, seeing the person before the disability, so that respect is created and devaluation, exclusion and prejudice are eliminated as this kind of label leads to stigmatisation by peers and impacts the learner's behaviour (Bailey & Thomson, 2009).

Teaching and learning

The Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons (UN CONVENTION: Article 24) states that stakeholders should respect the rights of persons with disabilities to education without discrimination and with equal opportunities within an inclusive education system, so that learners have access and effective participation to achieve their full potential, dignity and self-esteem, maintaining their human rights, fundamental freedom and diversity with respect for their personality and abilities (Spratt & Florian, 2015), whilst respecting the child in the same manner as their other peers.

Regarding anxiety EPP stated that all children at school suffer from anxiety, not only students with ADHD. Anxiety depends on the age, individual situation, level of coping skills and the type of support given. To support learning which reduces anxiety in children, all six participants highlighted the importance of a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) according to the child's learning styles, where visual and hands-on approaches were considered as the most beneficial to supporting the learning difficulties related with ADHD, especially in problem-solving tasks and in literacy. P2 describes her child as "inquisitive", so experiential learning enhances his motivation. Moreover, TCH and LSE2 gave importance to a scaffolded method, where teaching is introduced from "something easy and then you gradually get to the harder tasks" (TCH); "This will help to decrease anxiety in the student." (LSE2)

Regarding the accomplishment of satisfactory achievements, educators feel that an adequate model to apply is station teaching, because differentiating instructions can be delivered to different types of learners to approach their learning profile and behaviour, as they alternate groups at their own pace (Zigmond & Magiera, 2001). Moreover, the child is fully engaged and participates in an enjoyable manner. TCH gives importance to learning through play. As the child is not aware that learning is happening and becomes more confident, the feeling of pressure of "I am expected to work" does not occur, and the child does not become anxious. On the other hand, "a sense of competition comes in and they try their best, for themselves and for their group" (TCH). When allowing the students to discuss in a group, time should be given to think and collaborate. Allowing higher order thinking during groupwork increases working memory, so learning occurs. Educators claim that station participation establishes positive peer relationships, and the students become able to work and interact with peers. Hence, social skills are given priority so that teaching approaches and interventions lead to recognised effectiveness (Moore, 2017).

As in Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979), the primary school-aged children are in the ecological mesosystem. Spending time to learn and to make connections with others in a social environment gives the importance to build relationships and their own cognitive development (Elfer et al., 2018). According to Plato (428 BC), playful activity is an anticipatory socialisation process (Giardello, 2014). EPP and TCH also give importance to the buddy system. Both participants stated that whilst the child builds self-esteem and confidence, anxiety decreases. Additionally, difficulties in building and maintaining interpersonal relationships are decreased (Kauffman & Landrum, 2013).

From the parents' point of view, technology facilitates learning as it is a key competence for lifelong learning (European Reference Framework, 2007). P2 states that her child "finds technology calming and [it] eases his life". He prefers to type compositions rather than write them by hand, whilst text-to-speech is helpful for composition correction and for understanding comprehension tasks. Similarly, P1 states that her child prefers software to writing. Software such as Nessy and Octavo allow for reading books to be listened to and questions to be answered in a multiple-choice manner.

COVID-19 and the impact on learning

Regarding the COVID-19 restrictions and the shifting from the child-centred towards a more teacher-centred approach, all educators and EPP have remarked that children with ADHD and other SEN are the most affected in terms of anxiety. TCH confirmed that these learners were "becoming more stressed and frustrated," since learning was not occurring according to their learning style and in a UDL approach. As a result, behaviour issues escalated and these prevented new learning from occurring. However, all educators stated that they were trying to find alternatives to facilitate learning.

Both LSE1 and LSE2 observe that when a teacher-centred approach is delivered, learners become anxious as learning becomes abstract. Moreover, P1 and P2 confirm that the children "find abstract tasks difficult to understand". Both parents state that their children are unable to cope with problem sums and long comprehension passages. Furthermore, they note that their children are calmer during home-schooling as support was given via technology.

Conclusion

Implications of findings for current practice, policy and/or theory

Adhering to the Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons (UN-CONVENTION: Article 24), endorsing inclusion between stakeholders with equal opportunity and without discrimination, brings out a collaborative ethos, advanced self-confidence and committed participation to education (Weiss, 1999). Schools include parents through communication and assist home-based learning (Epstein, 2001). Meaningful family contribution leads to improved student outcomes (Carter, 2002), since parents impact their children's success academically and personally (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) through informing, involving and engaging (Amendt, 2008).

Collaborating on classroom matters promotes success (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Problem solving and accomplishing learning goals challenge students to become socially and academically collaborative (Laal, Laal & Kermanshahi, 2012). As Fielding (2000) explains, reciprocal care, mutual agreements and respect, where the child is seen as a person and not as a label, need to be fostered between stakeholders so that students build trust, and autonomous participation and feedback are encouraged.

In view of this, schools should serve as a community-learning intervention with connotation for curricula where a multi-disciplinary team feel a sense of responsibility to respect the child's sense of belonging, their strengths, needs and their meaningful backgrounds (Borg & Mayo, 2006), whilst implementing easy and straightforward accommodations and modifications to the environment in a child-centred approach teaching, equal opportunities and formative assessment to safeguard quality education to meet the diverse needs of our students (Azzopardi, 2010).

The present researcher feels that to advance the existing policies all educators (both teachers and LSEs) ought to have a critical knowledge and understanding of inclusive education, especially for learners with SEN, where they place themselves as learners so that empathy increases and the child becomes understood as a unique person. More training needs to be given to educators; not just pedagogy but also psychoeducation to comprehend the children's different profiles, their learning styles and difficulties, which need to be considered prior to teaching. Subsequently children with ADHD will feel that they have a meaningful role in society according to their intrinsic motivation and emotional value. Lastly, inclusion is not just about school and pedagogy structure, but where participation is adhered to, supported and respected for all learners according to their preferred learning style, together with communication and collaboration from parents. This safeguards the improvements implemented and the established goals that such policies target (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010).

References

MEDE. 2019. *A Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools – Route to Quality Inclusion*. Malta: Ministry for Education and Employment.

Abramovitch, A. 2016. "Misdiagnosis of ADHD in Individuals Diagnosed with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: Guidelines for Practitioners" in *Current Treatment Options in Psychiatry*, 3(3): 225-34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/S40501-016-0084-7>

Abramovitch, A., Dar, R., Hermesh, H. and Schweiger, A. 2012. "Comparative neuropsychology of adult obsessive-compulsive disorder and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder: Implications for a novel executive overload model of OCD" in *Journal of Neuropsychology*, 6(2): 161-191. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1748-6653.2011.02021.X>

Allen, K., Scheve, J. and Nieter, V. 2010. *Understanding Learning Styles: Making a Difference for Diverse Learners*. Huntington Beach, CA: Shell Education.

Alloway, T., Gathercole, S. and Pickering, S. 2006. "Verbal and Visuospatial Short-Term and Working Memory in Children: Are They Separable?" in *Child Development*, 77(6): 1698-1716. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1467-8624.2006.00968.X>

Amendt, T. 2008. Involvement to engagement: Community education practices in a suburban elementary school and an inner-city community school. (Unpublished Masters' dissertation, University of Saskatchewan, Canada). <http://hdl.handle.net/10388/etd-03192008-140125>

American Psychiatric Association, 2014. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Pub.

Ameringen, V.A., Mancin, C. and Farvolden, P. 2003. "The impact of anxiety disorders on educational achievement" in *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 17(5): 561-74.

Azzopardi, A., 2010. *Making sense of inclusive education: Where everyone belongs*. Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag.

Bagwell, C. L., Molina, B. S. G., Kashdan, T. B., Pelham, W. E. and Hoza, B. 2006. "Anxiety and Mood Disorders in Adolescents with Childhood Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder" in *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 14(3): 178-87. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/10634266060140030501>

Bailey, S. and Thomson, P. 2009. "Routine (dis)order in an infant school" in *Ethnography and Education*, 4: 211-27.

Bauermeister, J., Shrout, P., Chávez, L., Rubio-Stipec, M., Ramírez, R. and Padilla, L. Anderson, A., García, P. and Canino, G. 2007. "ADHD and gender: are risks and sequela of ADHD the same for boys and girls?" in *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 48(8): 831-39. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2007.01750.x> WebMD Editorial Contributors, 2019. "Diagnosing ADHD in Children and Adults" (11 June) in *WebMD*. Available at: <https://www.webmd.com/add-adhd/childhood-adhd/diagnosing-adhd>

Bokhari, A. 2020. "The Impact of Misdiagnosed ADHD on a Child's Education" in *Study.com*. <https://study.com/blog/the-impact-of-misdiagnosed-adhd-on-a-child-s-education.html>

Borg, C. and Mayo, P. 2006. "Challenges for Critical Pedagogy: A Southern European Perspective" in *University of Malta Critical Methodologies*, 6(1): 143-54. Available at: doi:10.1177/1532708605282809

Bowlby, J. 1982. "Attachment and loss: Retrospect and prospect" in *Am J Orthopsychiatry*, 52(4): 664-78. Available at: doi:10.1111/j.1939-0025.1982.tb01456.x

Bronfenbrenner, U., 1979. *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brown, T. E. 2014. *Smart but stuck: Emotions in teens and adults with ADHD*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Chilakamarri, J. K., Filkowski, M. M. and Ghaemi, S. N. 2011. "Misdiagnosis of bipolar disorder in children and adolescents: a comparison with ADHD and major depressive disorder" in *Ann Clin Psychiatry*, 23(1): 25-9.

Cadagan, M. and Garrido, D. 2016. Teachers' Strategies for Teaching Vocabulary in Classrooms with ADHD Students. (Unpublished Licentiate of Education dissertation, Universidad de Concepción, Chile).

Carter, S. 2002. *The impact of parent/family involvement on student outcomes: An annotated bibliography of research from the past decade*. Eugene, OR: CADRE. Available at: http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/parent_family_involv.cfm

Cherry, K. 2019. "What Is Attachment Theory? The Importance of Early Emotional Bonds" (22 February) in *verywellmind*. Available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-attachment-theory-2795337#citation-5>

Cumyn, L., French, L. and Hechtman, L. 2009. "Comorbidity in adults with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder" in *Can J Psychiatry*, 54(10): 673-83.

Cook, S. C., Rao, K. and Collins, L. 2017. "Self-Monitoring Interventions for Students With EBD: Applying UDL to a Research-Based Practice" in *Hammill Institute on Disabilities Beyond Behaviour*, 26(1): 19-27. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1074295617694407>

Dan, A. 2016. "The Results of an Early Intervention Program for Children with ADHD" in *International Journal of Early Childhood Learning*, 23(3): 11-20. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-7939/cgp/v23i03/11-20>

Eddine, A. S. 2016. "Anxiety and Scholastic Achievement of Moroccan EFL College Learners" in *JEELS (Journal of English Education and Linguistics Studies)*, 3(1). Available at: doi:10.30762/jeels.v3i1.172

Elfer, P., Greenfield, S., Robson, S., Wilson, D. and Zachariou, A. 2018. "Love, Satisfaction and Exhaustion in the Nursery: Methodological Issues in Evaluating the Impact of Work Discussion Groups in the Nursery" in *Early Child Development and Care*, 188(7): 892-904. Available at: doi: 10.1080/03004430.2018.1446431

Epstein, J. L. 2001. *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Eysenck, M. W., Derakshan, N., Santos, R. and Calvo, M. G. 2007. "Anxiety and cognitive performance: Attentional control theory" in *Emotion*, 7(2): 336-53. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/1528-3542.7.2.336>

Felder, R. M. and Henriques, E. R. 1995. "Learning and Teaching Styles in Foreign and Second Language Education" in *Foreign Language Annals*, 28(1): 21-31.

Fielding, M. 2000. "The Person-centred School" in *FORUM*, 42(2): 51-4.

Frenzel, A. C., Pekrun, R. and Goetz, T. 2007. "Perceived learning environment and students' emotional experiences: a multilevel analysis of mathematics classrooms" in *Learning & Instruction*, 17: 478-93.

Gable, R., Tonelson, S., Sheth, M., Wilson, C. and Park, K. 2012. "Importance, Usage, and Preparedness to Implement Evidence-based Practices for Students with Emotional Disabilities: A Comparison of Knowledge and Skills of Special Education and General Education Teachers" in *Education and Treatment of Children*, 35(4): 499-519. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42900173>

Gardner, H. 1983. *Multiple Intelligence: The Theory in Practice*. New York: Basic Books.

Giardello, P. 2014. *Pioneers in Early Childhood Education: The Roots and Legacies of Rachel and Margaret McMillan, Maria Montessori and Susan Isaacs*. Albingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Gilbert, P. and Procter, S. 2006. "Compassionate mind training for people with high shame and self-criticism" in *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 13(6): 353-79.

Graziano, P. A., McNamara, J. P., Geffken, G. R. and Reid, A. 2011. "Severity of children's ADHD symptoms and parenting stress: a multiple mediation model of self-regulation" in *Journal of abnormal child psychology*, 39(7): 1073-83. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-011-9528-0>

Halldner, L., Tillander, A., Lundholm, C., Boman, M., Långström, N., Larsson, H. and Lichtenstein, P. 2014. "Relative immaturity and ADHD: findings from nationwide registers, parent- and self-reports" in *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry, and allied disciplines*, 55(8), 897-904. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12229>

Harn, B., Parisi, D. and Stoolmiller, M. 2013. "Balancing fidelity with flexibility and fit: What do we really know about fidelity of implementation in schools?" in *Exceptional Children*, 79: 181-93.

Henderson, A. T. and Mapp, K. L. 2002. *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Available at: <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/catalog/items/fam33.html>

Hoza, B., Mrug, S., Gerdes, A. C., Hinshaw, S. P., Bukowski, W. M., Gold, J. A., Kraemer, H. C., Pelham, W. E., Jr, Wigal, T. and Arnold, L. E. 2005. "What aspects of peer relationships are impaired in children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder?" in *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 73(3): 411-23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.73.3.411>

Johnson, B. and Christensen, L. 2008. *Educational Research. Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches*, 3rd edit. London: Sage.

Johnson, D. W. and Johnson, R. T. 2009. "An Educational Psychology Success Story: Social Interdependence Theory and Cooperative Learning" in *Journal of Educational researcher*, 38(5): 365-79.

Kauffman, J. M. and Landrum, T. J., 2013. *Characteristics of emotional and behavioral disorders of children and youth*, 10th edit. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: European Reference Framework. 2007. European Parliament. Available at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/L_394/L_394_0012_01.pdf

Kossowsky, J., Wilhelm, F., Walton, R. and Schneider, S. 2011. "Separation anxiety disorder in children: Disorder-specific responses to experimental separation from the mother" in *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry, and allied disciplines*. 53(2): 178-87. Available at: doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.2011.02465.x.

Laal, M., Laal, M. and Kermanshahi, Z. K. 2012. "21st Century Learning: Learning in Collaboration" in *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 47: 1696-701. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/georg/Downloads/21st-century-learning-learning-in-collaboration.pdf>

Lapinski, S., Gravel, J. W. and Rose, D. H. 2012. "Tools for practice: The Universal Design for Learning Guidelines" in Hall, T. E., Meyer, A. and Rose, D. H. (eds). *Universal Design for Learning in the classroom: Practical applications*. New York: Guilford Press.

Lee, J. and Oh, K. 2013. "Development of an Adaptive Learning System applying Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences." SDIWC Conference. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/5570291/DEVELOPMENT_OF_AN_ADAPTIVE_LEARNING_SYSTEM_APPLYING_HOWARD_GARDNER_S_MULTIPLE_INTELLIGENCES

Liu, Y. 2012. "Students' perceptions of school climate and trait test anxiety" in *Psychological reports*, 111: 761-4. Available at: doi:10.2466/11.10.21.PR0.111.6.761-764.

Ljusberg, A. L. 2011. "The structured classroom" in *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15: 195-210.

Lombardi, S. M. 2011. Internet Activities for a Preschool Technology Education Program Guided by Caregivers. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, North Carolina State University, USA).

Maniadaki, K. 2020. "Early intervention in ADHD within the framework of the biopsychosocial model" in *Psychology*, 25(2): 51-72. Available at: https://doi.org/10.12681/psy_hps.25583

McGilloway, S. and Walen-Frederick, H. 2010. Childhood Characteristics Predicting Adult ADHD. Abstract. Walden University. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/256432/Childhood_Characteristics_Predicting_Adult_ADHD

Mikami, A., Ransone, M. and Calhoun, C. 2010. "Influence of Anxiety on the Social Functioning of Children With and Without ADHD" in *Journal Of Attention Disorders*, 15(6): 473-84. Available at: doi:10.1177/1087054710369066

Moore, D. A. 2017. "Educators' experiences of managing students with ADHD: a qualitative study" in *Child: care, health and development*, 43(4): 489-98. Available at: doi:10.1111/cch.12448

Mordre, M., Groholt, B., Kjelsberg, E., Sandstad, B. and Myhre, A. M. 2011. "The impact of ADHD and conduct disorder in childhood on adult delinquency: a 30 years follow-up study using official crime records" in *BMC psychiatry*, 11: 57. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-244X-11-57>

Nel, M., Engelbrecht, A., Swanepoel, H. and Hugo, A. 2013. *Embracing diversity through multi-level teaching: For foundation, intermediate and senior phase*. Cape Town, South Africa: Juta. Available at: <https://www.worldcat.org/title/embracing-diversity-through-multi-level-teaching-for-foundation-intermediate-and-senior-phase/oclc/870401357>

Nguyen, M. N., Watanabe-Galloway, S., Hill, J. L., Siahpush, M., Tibbits, M. K. and Wichman, C. 2019. "Ecological model of school engagement and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in school-aged children" in *European child & adolescent psychiatry*, 28(6): 795-805. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-018-1248-3>

Paepe, A. D. and Langerock, N. 2012. "Time causes forgetting from working memory" in *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 19(1): 87-92. Available at: doi:10.3758/s13423-011-0192-8

Peter, C. 2021. Teaching students with ADD/ADHD. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/6241725/Teaching_students_with_ADD_ADHD

Pinar, E., 2017. "Look at vocational education policies in terms of state-capital relations" in *Education Science Society*, 15(58): 38-59.

Polanczyk, G., de Lima, M., Horta, B., Biederman, J. and Rohde, L., 2007. "The Worldwide Prevalence of ADHD: A Systematic Review and Metaregression Analysis" in *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 164(6): 942-8. Available at: doi:10.1176/ajp.2007.164.6.942

Raggi, V. and Chronis, A. 2006. "Interventions to Address the Academic Impairment of Children and Adolescents with ADHD" in *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 9(2): 85-111. Available at: doi:10.1007/s10567-006-0006-0

Ragimova, L. 2014. "UDL as a response to diversity in education." Term paper. University of British Columbia Okanagan, USA. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/6933625/UDL_as_a_response_to_diversity_in_education

Rappley, M. D. 2005. "Clinical practice. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Review" in *New England Journal of Medicine*, 352: 165-73.

Reynolds, C. and Kamphaus, R. 2013. *Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)*. American Psychiatric Association. Available at: https://images.pearsonclinical.com/images/assets/basc-3/basc3resources/DSM5_DiagnosticCriteria_ADHD.pdf

Robinson, N. M. 2008. "The social world of gifted children and youth" in Pfeiffer, S. I. (ed.). *Handbook of giftedness in children: Psychoeducational theory, research, and best practices*. New York: Springer. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-74401-8_3

Watkins, A., Donnelly, V., Ebersold, S., Rose, R. and Skoglund, P. 2015. *Education for All: Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta. External Audit Report*. European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. Available at: <https://education.gov.mt/en/Documents/Special%20Needs%20and%20Inclusive%20Education%20in%20Malta%20%C2%AD-%20External%20Audit%20Report.pdf>

Schlenker, B. R. and Leary, M. R. 1982. "Social anxiety and self-presentation: A conceptualisation and model" in *Psychological Bulletin*, 92(3): 641-69.

Schwandt, H. and Wuppermann, A. C. 2015. "The Youngest Get the Pill: ADHD Misdiagnosis and the Production of Education in Germany." IZA Discussion Paper No. 9368. Available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2672154>

Smit, S., Preston, L. D. and Hay, J. 2020. "The development of education for learners with diverse learning needs in the South African context: A bio-ecological systems analysis" in *Afr J Disabil* (Online), 9: 1-9. Available at: [doi:10.4102/ajod.v9i0.670](https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v9i0.670)

Sørensen, L., Plessen, K. J., Nicholas, J. and Lundervold, A. J., 2011. "Is Behavioral Regulation in Children with ADHD Aggravated by Comorbid Anxiety Disorder?" in *Journal of Attention Disorders*, 15(1): 56-66. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1087054709356931>

Spencer, T. J. 2006. "ADHD and comorbidity in childhood" in *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 67(8): 27-31.

Spratt, J. and Florian, L. 2015. "Inclusive pedagogy: From learning to action. Supporting each individual in the context of 'everybody'" in *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 49: 89-96. Available at: [doi:10.1016/j.tate.2015.03.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.03.006)

Stefanatos, G. A. and Baron, I. S. 2007. "Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder: A neuropsychological perspective towards DSM-V" in *Neuropsychology Review*, 17: 5-38.

Tannock, R. 2000. "Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder with anxiety disorders" in Brown, T. E. (ed.). *Attention-deficit disorders and comorbidities in children, adolescents, and adults*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Education Needs. 1994. Ministry of Education and Science, Spain UNESCO clause 53. Available at: https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/Salamanca_Statement_1994.pdfT

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Disability. Article 24 – Education, 2021. Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-24-education.html>

Waldron, N. and McLeskey, J. 2010. "Establishing a Collaborative School Culture Through Comprehensive School Reform" in *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 20(1): 58-74. Available at: doi: 10.1080/10474410903535364

Watson, N. 2002. "Well, I Know this is Going to Sound Very Strange to You, but I Don't See Myself as a Disabled Person: Identity and disability" in *Disability & Society*, 17(5): 509-27. Available at: doi: 10.1080/09687590220148496

Weiss, E. M. 1999. "Perceived workplace conditions and first-year teachers' morale, career choice commitment, and planned retention: A secondary analysis" in *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 15(8): 861-79.

Yaman, D. Y. and Sökmez, A. B. 2020. "A case study on social-emotional problems in gifted children" in *Ilkogretim Online*, 19(3): 1768-80. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17051/ilkonline.2020.735156>

Zigmond, N. and Magiera, K. 2001. "Current practice alerts: A focus on co-teaching" in *Alerts*, 36: 58-68.

School Self-Evaluation: Process and Perspectives

Angele Pulis

author's contact: Dr Angele Pulis - angela.pulis@ilearn.edu.mt

The history of school self-evaluation and the history of schools are intrinsically linked. Some form of self-evaluation must have occurred in schools since their inception. We can easily visualise the leaders in the schools of Ancient Greece contemplating how to best assess their school practices. The concept of self-evaluation is tied with the concept of a desire to learn from experience, maintain good practices and improve. Over the years self-evaluation of schools became more methodical and structured. As schools changed, school-based evaluation changed as well. Society asks, indeed demands, that schools become accountable.

Schools want to be able to demonstrate that they are accountable to their stakeholders; to do this they must be in a position to provide convincing evidence of their success and a clear plan of action which maps out how improvements will be made. (Ofsted, 2012: 4)

There is consensus that the right direction for schools is to embrace a culture of evaluation and assessment (Chapman and Sammons, 2013). Self-evaluation of schools provides a snapshot of what is happening in a school and how it is happening. Armed with information, the school could be in a better position to make the right decisions that will lead to school improvement. Murgatroyd and Morgan (1992: 155) assert: "The critical issue is: how can we collect good information so that we can make good decisions? The focus and emphasis are upon making decisions, not measurement." According to Murgatroyd and Morgan (1992), evaluative exercises are not an end in themselves, but they are diagnostic tools that help the school to identify its strengths and weaknesses. Building on this premise, if the school acts on the indications which emerge from internal evaluation, a fertile setting for school improvement could be created. The interest of the student is at the heart of everything that happens in a school, so one could further argue that the ultimate aim of school self-evaluation is directly or indirectly linked to student welfare.

Defining school self-evaluation

A variety of definitions for 'school' or 'educational' evaluation are put forward in the literature. These definitions usually include a concise description of the process. Each one makes a valid contribution to the overall understanding of the term by emphasising a particular aspect of the process. Wilcox (1981) outlines educational evaluation in a generic and uncontroversial way: "Education evaluation occurs whenever an attempt is made to assess the value of an educational activity, policy or system" (p. 77). On the other hand Marsh (1997: 234) offers a more in-depth definition:

School evaluation involves an examination of the goals, rationale and structure of teachers' curricula, a study of the context in which the interactions with students occur (including parent and community inputs) and an analysis of the interests, motivations and achievements of the students' experiences.

Adelman and Alexander (1982: 5) attach added detail; they include the notion of comparing the end result with the original targets, and explain this as:

the making of judgements about the worth and effectiveness of educational intentions, processes and outcomes; about the relationships between these; and about the resource, planning and implementation frameworks for such ventures.

The idea of judging the outcomes with the original targets is also expressed by Coleman (2005: 152), who states it thus:

Evaluation is a process which involves looking back systematically at what has been accomplished and measuring the present position against the original aims. It usually involves some sort of judgement on success in meeting aims and/or feedback which can be used for improvement.

Aspinwall et al. (1992) briefly describe the stages involved in the evaluation process. In their definition they highlight the value of establishing a predetermined yardstick with which to measure the success of a particular educational initiative. They also emphasise an important point – the link between evaluation and the decision-making process. The relatively short definition provided by Aspinwall et al. (1992: 2) encompasses several significant aspects in the evaluation process:

Evaluation is part of the decision-making process. It involves making judgements about the worth of an activity through systematically and openly collecting and analysing information about it and relating this to explicit objectives, criteria and values.

The notion of carrying out evaluation to be able to formulate a judgement is echoed in the definition offered by Rogers and Badham (1992), who say that "Evaluation is the process of systematically collecting and analysing information in order to form value judgements based on firm evidence. (p. 3)

Caldwell and Spinks (1988: 143) present the definition in a novel way; they provide an equation to illustrate the meaning of evaluation:

EVALUATION IS QUANTITATIVE DESCRIPTIONS (Measurement)
AND/OR QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIONS (Non-measurement)
PLUS VALUE JUDGEMENTS

The above definitions focus on evaluation in general; they do not specify whether it is being conducted internally or externally. Many aspects of the two processes are relevant to both 'school evaluation' and 'school self-evaluation'. However, whilst sharing many characteristics with 'school evaluation' usually, 'school self-evaluation' has distinctive features that focus on the self-assessment aspect. Stoll and Mortimore (1997) refer to classroom practice in their definition of school self-evaluation: "the collection and analysis of school and pupil data, action research in classrooms and appraisal" (p. 15). In school self-evaluation the school initiates and executes the whole process (Depoortere et al., 1987). This implies a combined effort that involves the participation of various stakeholders.

As can be drawn from the various definitions that have been reviewed, school self-evaluation is a reflective process where data are gathered on the school; the data are then analysed and used to determine future decisions. The process is described as 'internal' if the exercise is planned and implemented by members of the school staff. The magnitude of the assessment exercise may vary. Small scale self-evaluation exercises could be carried out by individual members of staff or by small groups (e.g. by a subject department or a year group). On a larger scale, more formal means of inquiry may be employed, involving all members of staff and possibly students, parents or members from the outside community. Summarising and simplifying the gist of various literary sources, the following could be a working definition: School self-evaluation refers to any exercise initiated and carried out by the school, to assess the value of any aspect of school-life. School self-evaluation is an evaluative exercise carried out *by* the school *for* the school.

The influence of business management

The terminology used in schools has been unashamedly borrowed from managerial discourse. Schools talk of 'audits', 'accountability', 'stakeholders' and 'clients or customers'. The term 'audit' is often translated as 'evaluation' in the school context and the two terms are often used interchangeably. Business organisations do not carry out 'self-evaluation';

they carry out internal audits, but the mechanisms involved correspond to what happens in school self-evaluation.

In the mid-1940s Deming developed Total Quality Management (Lussier, 2003), frequently referred to as TQM. This is a management style based on producing quality service as defined by the customer. It gained success in Japan and the Japanese business world as it started concentrating on producing quality products. In the 1970s and 80s many American companies, including Ford, IBM and Xerox, decided to adopt the successful Deming's principles of TQM. Total Quality Management proved to be hugely successful. It gained prominence in the private sector and was later adopted by public organisations. One of the fundamental commitments of TQM is that towards data-based decision-making. This means that evaluation is an ongoing process. Whilst discussing TQM, Dale and Bunney (1999: 203) note that:

If a process of continuous improvement is to be sustained and its pace increased it is essential that organizations assess and monitor on a regular basis which activities are going well, which have stagnated, what needs to be improved and what is missing.

The development of models for school self-evaluation

According to Norris (1990), the work of Frederick Taylor introduced analytical systems into management in the USA. Norris reports that Taylor's work influenced the educational system. He notes that by 1915 the US Office of Education was carrying out surveys on different aspects of school life in about 30 large schools. Ralph W. Tyler is regarded by many as the founder of educational evaluation (Stufflebeam et al., 2000). Tyler's work in the USA made a breakthrough in school evaluation during the 1930s. Until then the emphasis had been on monitoring and supervising what was occurring in schools. He was the first to link evaluation with school effectiveness. Tyler had described school evaluation as: "essentially the process of determining to what extent the educational objectives are realised by the program of curriculum and instruction" (Tyler, 1949, as cited in Norris, 1990: 18).

In Britain the earliest evaluation studies were carried out to test whether i.t.a. (initial teaching alphabet) was assisting the development of reading in children (Norris, 1990). At that time an alternative teaching method was called t.o. (traditional orthography). Several evaluative studies comparing the two different teaching methods were carried out in the late 1950s. In 1962 the Nuffield Foundation Science Teaching Projects were launched;

and, according to Norris (1990), in the opinion of the Nuffield Lodge, the project was not to be externally evaluated. They believed that the success of a good project would be easily manifested to all concerned. In 1964 external evaluation of the Nuffield Schools Council Primary French project commenced. The aim was to analyse whether the project was achieving the set targets. It included questionnaires and a longitudinal study. The Schools' Council was set up in 1964 and soon afterwards the Evaluation Advisory Committee was established. The committee set out to evaluate not only projects but it also targeted curriculum evaluation in a wider perspective.

Clift (1987) refers to a self-evaluation programme developed in Solihull, in 1979, as an example of a school-based review adopted by LEAs in England and Wales. The scheme was a voluntary one and a booklet on school-based evaluation for secondary schools was published in 1979. Schools were not obliged to use the booklet, nor were they obliged to send written reports. The booklet focuses on four main sections of school life, namely:

- i. Evaluating organisation and management
- ii. Evaluating specific aspects of the school's work
- iii. Further analysis of the teacher's role
- iv. In-service education and staff development.

Under each section several statements are listed, describing each area in detail. The booklet invites teachers to evaluate the specific areas under each section, while the aim of the exercise was not school accountability but school improvement.

Another exemplar is the Traditional Evaluation Model. Marsh (1997) notes that in this model the Head of School initiates the evaluative exercise and controls it from start to finish. As one descends the level of hierarchy in the school, the amount of active and influential participation in the exercise decreases. An external panel composed of people who do not work in the school undergoing the evaluative exercise is set up to collect and analyse data. The main focus of the evaluative exercise is on the school's results. Marsh describes the 4 stages in the Traditional Evaluation Model:

- i. A reflection on the school's objectives
- ii. An evaluation report
- iii. Evaluation by external panel
- iv. Findings and recommendations

Marsh (1997) reports that the model was popular with schools and that it offered several advantages: the external panel can put forward ideas and criticise the school in a way that people inside the school cannot; the panel is focused on the evaluative exercise and this ensures more efficient use of resources and the exercise might lead to school improvement.

Subsequently, in Britain, other models were developed. MacBeath (1999) refers to the self-evaluation model developed by the commission of the National Union of Teachers in 1995. The research team worked with ten schools in England and Wales, these being from both the primary and secondary sector. The initial phase of the project investigated the views of six stakeholders – teachers, management staff, support staff, pupils, parents, and governors. The stakeholders were asked to identify the characteristics of a 'good' school. The study revealed ten indicators:

- a. school climate
- b. relationships
- c. organisation and communication
- d. time and resources
- e. recognition of achievement
- f. equity
- g. home-school links
- h. support for teaching
- i. classroom climate
- j. support for learning

These indicators are a *sine qua non* for any school self-evaluation exercise.

School development planning

School development planning may be considered a tool for better school management (MacGilchrist & Mortimore, 1997). Schools construct a plan which outlines the school's aims and ways to achieve these aims. "Development planning is more than a development plan, the document: it is the process of creating the plan and then ensuring that it is put into effect" (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991: 3). The actual process is made up of several stages (Stoll and Fink, 1996), namely:

- i. Assessment
- ii. Planning
- iii. Implementation
- iv. Evaluation

According to Stoll and Fink (1996) the first stage is also called 'the audit stage'; this stage provides a snapshot of the school's situation. This preliminary stage enables the school to obtain an objective review that will help shape and determine the planning stage. In the planning stage an action plan is drawn up. The targets, deadlines, persons responsible, resources needed and success criteria are spelt out in the action plan. During the implementation stage the plans are translated into actions. Lastly there is the evaluation stage, when the outcomes emanating from the implementation stage are examined, employing the set success criteria.

Intrinsic to school development planning is the notion of evaluation. Stoll and Fink (1996: 66) argue that evaluation permeates the whole process of school development planning, and it should not be assigned as a fixed, final stage:

In most schemes the final stage of development planning is evaluation. To describe it as the final stage does not do it justice because, in actual fact, it plays a major role in every phase of development planning and, as such, its impact is felt much earlier.

The function of self-evaluation in schools

According to some perspectives, for schools to progress, evaluation is indispensable. The self-reflecting school modifies and improves its future actions because of its past actions. In the process, new, and hopefully superior, courses of action are developed. Holly and Southworth (1989: 2) sum up the relevance of evaluation in schools thus: "The developing school is the evaluative school."

Neil and Johnston (2005: 74) maintain that school self-evaluation is beneficial to schools:

When it is effective, self-evaluation in a school has the potential to raise awareness among teachers about the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning both within their own classrooms and in the wider school context, to enable teachers to develop new teaching methods as appropriate and to promote improved learning outcomes for students.

Self-evaluation in school management

Effective evaluation processes are linked with effective management (Aspinwall et al., 1992). The evaluative stage forms part of the Development Cycle, which features prominently in effective management (Newton and Tarrant, 1992).



Fig. 1: The Development Cycle (source: Newton and Tarrant, 1992: 34)

In schools, self-evaluation could be a means to ensure the existence and implementation of the Development Cycle. Aspinwall et al. (1992: 14) assert that:

It is not enough to think of it simply as something which is a stage in the planning process, let alone something which is 'bolted' on as an afterthought. It must be a continuous subject of attention and must be soundly embedded in the structure and culture of the organisation.

This affirms the position of Stoll and Fink (1996), who argue in favour of a model that integrates self-evaluation at all levels of planning and management.

School self-evaluation and school improvement

School improvement signifies a positive progression for a school (Winch, 1997). It is not a destination; it is a journey for a better school (Stoll & Mortimore, 1997). According to some exponents of school self-evaluation the ultimate aim of school self-evaluation is school improvement (Cuttance, 1997; Redfern, 1980). Vella (1997: 75), who was a Head of School in various Maltese schools, notes that:

While not ignoring, by any means, the importance of accountability and the need for it, I consider the overriding goal of school evaluation to be school improvement, with the aim of achieving quality and equity in teaching and learning for all students within a school and a school system as a whole.

Stoll and Mortimore (1997) agree that school self-evaluation and school improvement are intrinsically linked; they refer to school self-evaluation as one of the "improvement doors" (p. 15) that can be opened from inside the school.

Conducting an effective school self-evaluation exercise

Since every school is unique, each one should explore the best way of carrying out its self-evaluation. Ofsted (2012) recommends that schools should be given the liberty to formulate their own self-evaluation model. It invites them to ask six important questions (Ofsted, 2012: 7-10) which help schools reflect on the manner self-evaluation is being carried out:

- i. Does the self-evaluation identify how well our school serves its learners?
- ii. How does our school compare with the best schools and the best comparable schools?
- iii. Is the self-evaluation an integral part of our key management systems?
- iv. Is our school's self-evaluation based on a good range of telling evidence?
- v. Do our self-evaluation and planning involve key people in the school and seek the views of parents, learners and external advisers and agencies?
- vi. Does our self-evaluation lead to action to achieve the school's longer-term goals for development?

These questions could be considered as a self-evaluation exercise on the school self-evaluation process.

Rogers and Badham (1992: 7) provide practical advice on how to carry out school self-evaluation. They warn against lengthy and complex processes, and offer guidelines, in the form of four key words, for a reliable and meaningful exercise:

- i. The outcomes should be VALUABLE to all stakeholders
- ii. The judgements made should be backed by data; in other words, they should be VALID
- iii. The process of how the judgments were reached should be credible and clear; the process should be VERIFIABLE
- iv. The process should be feasible, and it should merit the effort and time invested; the process should be VIABLE

Stages in the self-evaluation process

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, a school self-evaluation exercise is made up of a series of stages. Adelman and Alexander (1982: 23) describe several decisions that must be made during the process of evaluation. The order in which the decisions are listed describes the different stages in the self-evaluation process.

- i. Goals – What purposes does the process purport to achieve?
- ii. Focus – Which aspects are being assessed?
- iii. Methods – Which methods are to be employed? Which evaluative judgements are being used?
- iv. Criteria – What will be the criteria for gauging the aspects being studied?
- v. Organisation – Who will be responsible for the process? Which resources will be used?
- vi. Dissemination – How will the data gathered be published? Which sectors of the public are targeted?
- vii. Application – How will the results obtained be put into good use? How will the results influence decisions taken?

A school self-evaluation exercise yields data. What happens, or what could happen, to the data produced is another aspect that needs to be considered. McNealy (1993), whilst discussing quality in business organisations, notes that most organisations produce a surplus of data. He notes that this data is: "Unopened, unread, unproductive" (McNealy, 1993: 98). This situation could very easily occur in schools, wherein numerous policy documents and circulars meet the aforementioned fate. This is one of the hazards that schools must be wary of. To help prevent this, schools must first prepare the groundwork which will provide the optimum environment for a school self-evaluation exercise.

Preparing the ideological terrain

Prior to embarking on a self-evaluation process, schools should be certain of what they are doing, and why. Half-hearted, casual attempts at self-evaluation can never yield commendable results. The whole concept of internal evaluation should be marketed in a positive way. Marsh (1997: 190) refers to three different types of change strategies described by Bennis et al. (1976).

- a. The first strategy is called Power-Coercive; it relies on the use of sanctions to force people into complying with the new strategy. This strategy does not motivate people to relate positively to the innovation. In a school context it will not bring about meaningful and effective change.
- b. The second strategy is called Normative or Re-educate; it focuses on encouraging people to view the change from a positive perspective. This strategy is more likely to result in change that is long-lasting but the change might still be seen as being imposed from above.
- c. The third strategy is called Empirical-Rational; it relies on convincing the participants that the change is for their own benefit. This strategy takes longer to implement; it involves careful planning and hard work. However, in the process, people are given the chance to voice their opinions and concerns during discussions and brainstorming sessions. In this way they are more likely to feel joint ownership and responsibility for the introduced innovation. This type of strategy could be adopted when introducing self-evaluation in a school.

For school self-evaluation to be successful the process should be introduced and implemented in a culture that embraces professional growth and professional self-respect (Clift, 1987). Such a culture would be prepared for the pains that often accompany the process of growth. Effective channels of communication, collaboration and impartiality are thus prerequisite for school self-evaluation. Clift (1987: 64) notes that school self-evaluation "requires idealised schools (or perhaps creates them?) in which collegiality, cooperation, open communication and fraternity rule, and where professional development and professional self-respect go hand in hand". It is difficult to ascertain if the desirable attributes of a school are a precondition for the self-evaluation process or whether they are an outcome of the process. Either way, schools may stand to gain from the 'cause and effect' situation brought about by school self-evaluation.

What should schools evaluate?

In addressing this question Stoll and Fink (1996) argue that schools should evaluate what they value. This succinct response conveys the spirit of school self-evaluation. Schools will evaluate what they consider is important – what is worth to be evaluated. In fact, the aspects of school life chosen for evaluation are indicative of the aims of the school.

To give a more practical answer to the above question, schools could choose to evaluate quality in education. There are various characteristics that may be evaluated so that one obtains a clearer picture of how the school scores. The following list draws on the works of Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991), MacBeath (1999), Reid et al. (1987), Reynolds et al. (1996) and Vella (1997) and includes various key areas:

- i. The curriculum
- ii. The teaching and learning
- iii. Equity
- iv. Home-school relationship
- v. Educational leadership
- vi. Organisation and management
- vii. Pastoral care
- viii. Staff development
- ix. Methods of academic assessment
- x. School ethos
- xi. The physical environment
- xii. Discipline
- xiii. Relationships in school: teacher/student, teacher/administration, student/administration, teacher/teacher, student/student, relationships with non-teaching staff
- xiv. Relationships with the outer school community
- xv. Communication
- xvi. Time management
- xvii. Physical and human resources

In *A New Relationship with Schools: Improving performance through school self-evaluation* Ofsted (2012: 5-6) answers the question in a more generic way. It maintains that schools should evaluate:

- i. Overall standards
- ii. Standards of specific groups, e.g., gifted students, students with special needs, those from minority groups
- iii. Progress made over time by groups of students
- iv. Outcomes from students' personal development
- v. The teaching, curriculum, and guidance provision
- vi. Leadership and management
- vii. Specific features and objectives of the school
- viii. Links between the school and other providers, services, employers, organisations
- ix. Plans and strategies
- x. Resources

Sources of data

There are different sources of quantitative data that schools could collect to assess the key areas they want to investigate (Aspinwall et al., 1992; Newton & Tarrant, 1992). These include:

- i. Academic results/performance
- ii. Attendance records (students)
- iii. Student turnover
- iv. Opinions of students/teachers/parents/members of the outside school community
- v. Trends in students' choices when deciding on option subjects
- vi. Post-secondary performance of school leavers
- vii. Records from specialised rooms/labs, e.g., the Library could supply the number/type of books borrowed
- viii. Teacher turnover
- ix. Attendance records (for parents attending school events)
- x. Classroom logistics, e.g., class size, staff-student ratio
- xi. Financial data
- xii. Data on buildings, e.g., maintenance records, space usage

Methods of collecting data

There are various modes of collecting data (Aspinwall et al., 1992; Marsh, 1997). Among these, one can use:

- i. Questionnaires – to students/teachers/parents
- ii. Interviews
- iii. Spot-checking
- iv. Checklists of skills and behaviour
- v. Time-on-task analysis
- vi. Critical friend
- vii. Observation
- viii. Shadowing students/teachers/members of the Senior Management Team
- ix. Longitudinal studies
- x. Staff appraisal
- xi. Criticism from external agents
- xii. Journals
- xiii. Recording of conversations
- xiv. Recording of teaching sessions

Criteria for success

As in any other evaluative exercise the criteria for judging the success or otherwise must be set before carrying out the actual exercise. An important part of the evaluation process is a predetermined and clear reference with which one can compare the data collected. Gray et al. (1999: 39) describe three different ways how school performance can be assessed:

- i. Comparing the school's performance with national standards
- ii. Inquiring how well the school is performing by comparing with its own previous standards; comparing 'like with like'
- iii. Asking whether the school is 'improving'; here the term is applied rather loosely

According to Wroe and Halsall (2001) internal benchmarking can be very constructive in school self-evaluation. These authors have analysed self-evaluation in an infant school in the UK. They concluded that the main advantage of internal benchmarking was that it helped the school to address problems experienced by individual students.

Disadvantages of school self-evaluation

- a. Judgement by others

When a school engages in an internal evaluation exercise it is exposing itself. No institution is eager on exposing its dirty linen in public. Adelman

and Alexander (1982: 161) acknowledge that it can be “challenging, uncomfortable, untidy and potentially disturbing to an institution’s equilibrium”. A negative aspect of self-evaluation of schools is that the people being evaluated might feel that the scrutiny might result in the drawing of erroneous conclusions by others. A degree of subjectivity in the interpretation of the data collected is rather inevitable, while when results are published there is also the fear that someone will be put in a bad light. It is very easy to point fingers. Teachers and administrators in a school might be concerned about the disadvantages of airing the school’s weaknesses. Whilst engaging in the evaluation process participants might fear that the consequences will have adverse feedback on them personally. Rudd and Davies (2000) carried out a study on self-evaluation in 23 schools. They reported that in a few instances members of staff were sceptical of the process. Redfern (1980) also notes that: “Some teachers have, on occasion, viewed self-evaluation as self-indictment, but such an opinion suggests either a lack of understanding or a gross distortion of the process” (p. 33). These reactions are also confirmed by research carried out in Malta by Privitelli and Bezzina (2007), who conducted a case study on school self-evaluation in a local Church school. They reported that initially teachers were apprehensive and cynical about the process.

b. Subjective criteria for success

Different people have expectations from educational endeavours. This makes the evaluative process subjective. Greenwood and Gaunt (1994: 29) note that: “The particular problem of a school is that we have a number of ultimate customers whose requirements may not appear to be compatible.” Applying the Total Quality Management model to the school context, the criteria of success are laid down by the dictates of the customers. In a school the customers compromise the students, parents, educational authorities, future employers, institutions for higher education and society at large. Schools must engage in the arduous task of trying to appease the different demands of a wide variety of customers. At the same time, unlike business organisations, schools cannot be fashioned solely on the whims of a particular group of ‘customers’.

c. Difficulty to evaluate or quantify certain aspects

In a business organisation it is relatively easy to discuss results presented on graphs and pie-charts. Extrapolations can be made. Competent personnel might even accurately calculate how proposed changes affect future profits. There are complex mathematical formulae that, if adhered to, might indicate the best course to follow. However, in schools, the

situation is totally different. Schools deal primarily with people, with values, with attitudes and not with numbers. As a counter argument to this, Bottery (1994) argues that even though in education it is admittedly difficult to value the cost of 'production', it is important to do so. As an example, Bottery (1994) tries to calculate the cost of a two-hour university lecture of poor quality. He lists the cost of hiring the lecture room, wasted secretarial work, photocopying, besides the cost (not in monetary form) of boredom, headaches and the cost to the university's reputation. His approach acts as an eye-opener to evaluators, provoking them to think about 'hidden costs' in the educational system. Some of these costs are too complex and qualitative in nature to be measured: frustration, time, energy, attitudes; however, a valid and holistic evaluative process would at least be alert to their existence and that these too diminish the quality of education.

According to Wagner (1989) there is the problem of 'indeterminate ends'. In business it is easy to measure results because what is measured can be quantified. However, in education there are many areas that are difficult to quantify. Wagner (1989: 24) notes that:

Advocates of performance contracting argue that it is possible to formulate and measure performance objectives in business and that much the same can be done in education. But this position rests on the belief that educational ends and the means to their achievement are sufficiently analogous with those of business to use similar accountability procedures, an assumption open to question for several reasons.

At times, in education, the seeds sown today might not be reaped for many years. No one knows when the dormant seed might suddenly spring to life. The learning process does not necessarily progress in a linear mode, and the valuable lessons learnt might not match exactly with the lessons which were planned. What goes on in schools is so complex that most probably it is impossible to render it as measurable qualities.

d. Time consumption

Any evaluative exercise is time-consuming. The coordination of the exercise, data collection and analysis entail time and effort from all involved (Rogers & Badham, 1992). Teachers and administrators in a school might easily become anxious that on top of the overloaded syllabi, the insurmountable amount of paperwork and the increasing list of new tasks bestowed on them at the dawn of every new scholastic year, they

now also have the added burden of participating in the self-evaluation process.

e. Lack of positive outcomes from the process

School self-evaluation might potentially lead to a better school. One cannot assume that school improvement automatically follows internal evaluation. One particular study did, in fact, show that school self-evaluation did not bring about school progress. Clift et al. (1987) studied how self-evaluation was carried out in different schools. Seven different contexts were examined. The aim was to analyse how self-evaluation affected teachers, the administration and the whole school. The study concluded that school self-evaluation was not instrumental in bringing about the anticipated positive changes in schools. Local research on school self-evaluation (Pulis, 2010), which included quantitative data gathered from 13 secondary heads of school, showed that there were mixed opinions on the link between school self-evaluation and school improvement. Fig. 2 summarises the responses of the heads of school (Pulis, 2010: 119).

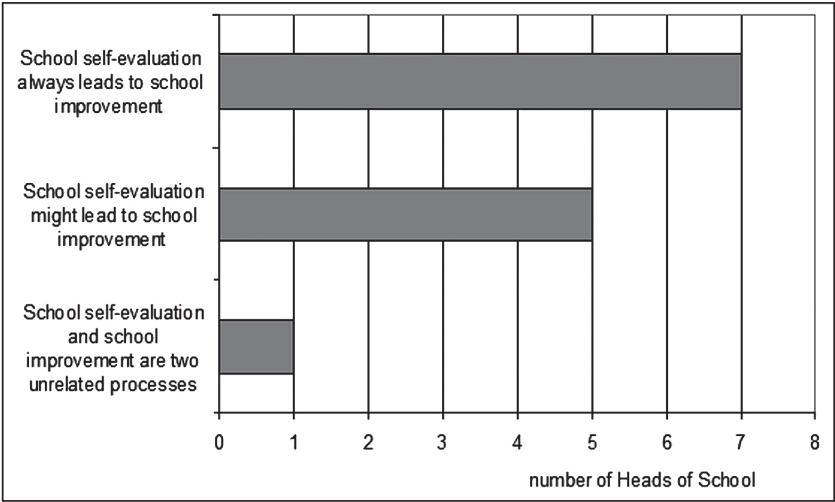


Fig. 2: Responses of heads of school regarding the connection between school self-evaluation and school improvement

The Maltese context

The provision for school self-evaluation is found in *A National Curriculum Framework for All* (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012: 30).

Quality Assurance is to be realised through a system of ongoing self-evaluation, monitoring and review within schools complemented by an external review system that together foster school improvement.

In Maltese state schools internal evaluation is officially carried out as part of school development planning (Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2020). Schools are provided with templates that could be used during school self-evaluation. The internal review template (Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2020) offers guidelines and suggestions for schools on how to conduct self-evaluation. It leads schools to develop priority development targets, to translate this into School Development Action Plans and to articulate the longer-term vision and strategy for the school.

In the same local study referred to above (Pulis, 2010) a total of 40 interviews were carried out with the main stakeholders in the school self-evaluation process. These included heads of school, teachers, non-teaching personnel in schools, students and parents. The main findings of the research were:

- a. School self-evaluation is considered an important process by all stakeholders
- b. All stakeholders show an eagerness to engage in the process.
- c. By and large, school self-evaluation is being conducted in an informal and infrequent way
- d. School personnel need professional training on school self-evaluation.
- e. A significant portion of human resources is not being utilised. Non-teaching staff is being totally excluded and parents only play a minor role
- f. Teachers, non-teaching personnel and parents show a lack of ownership of the process
- g. Students willingly participate in the process but they feel that their feedback needs to be heard more
- h. The head of school is shouldering the main and sometimes the sole responsibility for the process
- i. Heads of school find school self-evaluation a time-consuming process

When participants were asked which were the aspects that a school should evaluate, a variety of responses were obtained. The most frequently mentioned categories included the generic reply 'education'; other popular responses were: teaching and learning, students' behaviour, school discipline and examination results. Fig. 3 summarises the collated data from all stakeholders (Pulis, 2010: 126).

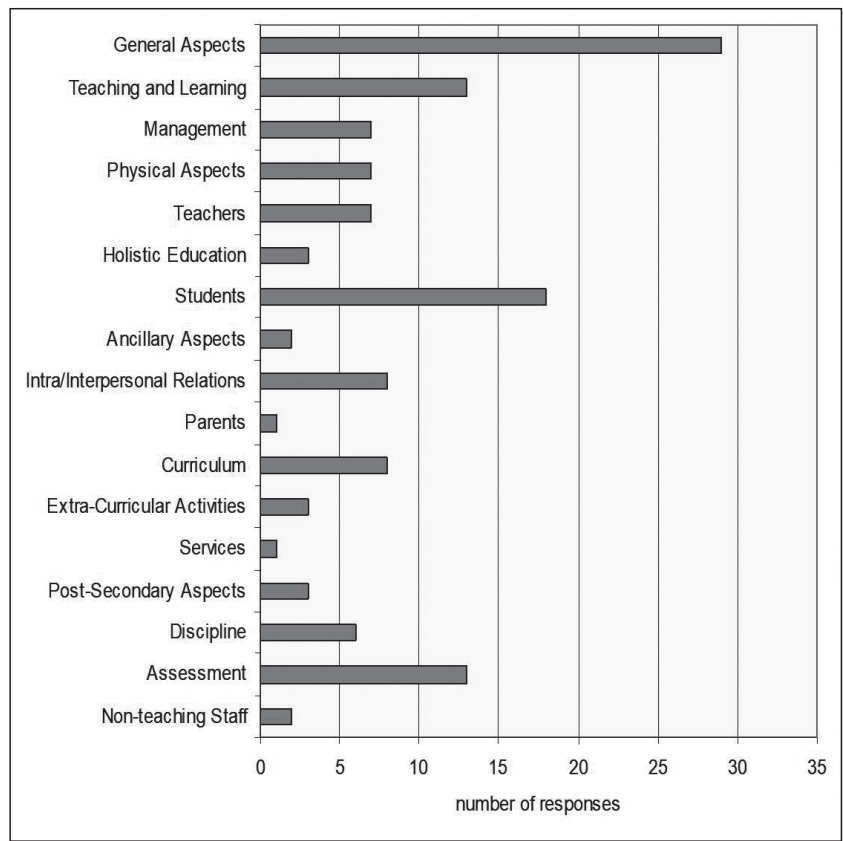


Fig. 3: Frequency of responses under each category

These categories are very similar to those referred to by Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991) and MacBeath (1999), Reid et al. (1987), Reynolds et al. (1996) and Vella (1997), and indicate that there is a common accord on the selection of important school aspects that ought to be evaluated.

Concluding note

The factors moulding school life are complex and constantly changing. Each school must find for itself the best solutions for its problems. To be in a position for schools to prescribe their own cure they must first learn how to self-diagnose their problems. MacBeath (1999: 1) notes:

It is an index of a nation's educational health when its school communities have a high level of intelligence and know how to use the tools of self-evaluation and self-improvement.

This is what school self-evaluation aspires to achieve – helping schools to find the best possible route for themselves in their journey of self-improvement.

References

- Adelman, C. and Alexander, R. J. 1982. *The Self-Evaluating Institution*. London: Methuen.
- Aspinwall, K., Simkins, T., Wilkinson, J. F. and McAuley, J. M. 1992. *Managing Evaluation in Education*. London: Routledge.
- Bennis, W. G., Benne, K. D., Chin, R. and Corey, K. E. 1976. *The planning of change*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Bottery, M. 1994. *Lessons For Schools?* London: Cassell.
- Caldwell, B. J. and Spinks, J. M. 1988. *The Self-Managing School*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Coleman, M. 2005. "Evaluation in Education" in Coleman, M. and Earley, P. (eds). *Leadership and Management in Education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chapman, C. and Sammons, P. 2013. *School self-evaluation for school improvement: What works and why?* Reading, UK: CfBT Education Trust.
- Clift, P. 1987. "LEA initiated school-based review in England and Wales" in Hopkins, D. (ed.), *Improving the Quality of Schooling*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Clift, P. S., Nuttall, D. and McCormick, R. 1987. *Studies in School Self-Evaluation*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Cuttance, P. 1997. "Quality assurance for schools" in Tony, T. (ed.). *Restructuring and Quality: Issues for Tomorrow's Schools*. London: Routledge.

Dale, B. and Bunney, H. 1999. *Total Quality Management Blueprint*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2020. *Internal Review*. Government of Malta. Available at <https://education.gov.mt/en/dqse/Pages/Internal-Review.aspx>

Depoortere, J., de Soete, M. and Hellyn, J. 1987. "School based review as an innovation strategy: The Belgian renewed primary school" in Hopkins, D. (ed.). *Improving the Quality of Schooling*. London: The Falmer Press.

Gray, J., Hopkins, D., Reynolds, D., Wilcox, B., Farrell, S. and Jesson, D. 1999. *Improving Schools: Performance and Potential*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Greenwood, M. S. and Gaunt, H. J. 1994. *Total Quality Management for Schools*. London: Cassell.

Hargreaves, D. H. and Hopkins, D. 1991. *The Empowered School*. London: Cassell.

Holly, P. and Southworth, G. 1989. *The Developing School*. London: The Falmer Press.

Lussier, R. N. 2003. *Management fundamentals: Concepts, applications, skill development*. 2nd edit. Mason, OH: South-Western.

MacBeath, J. 1999. *Schools Must Speak for Themselves*. London: Routledge.

MacGilchrist, B. and Mortimore, P. 1997. "School effectiveness and school improvement" in *An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice*, 8 (2): 198-218.

Marsh, C. 1997. *Planning, Management and Ideology: Key Concepts for Understanding Curriculum 2*. London: The Falmer Press.

McNealy, R. M. 1993. *Making Quality Happen*. London: Chapman and Hall.

Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012. *A National Curriculum Framework for All*. Malta: Salesian Press.

Murgatroyd, S. and Morgan, C. 1992. *Total Quality Management and the School*. Buckingham: Open Press.

Neil, P. and Johnston, J. 2005. "An approach to analysing professional discourse in a school self-evaluation project" in *Research in Education*, 73: 73-86.

Newton, C. and Tarrant, T. 1992. *Managing Change in School*. London: Routledge.

Norris, N. 1990. *Understanding Educational Evaluation*. London: Kogan Page Ltd.

Ofsted, 2012. *A New Relationship with Schools: Improving Performance Through School Self-Evaluation*. Nottingham: DfES Publications. Available at <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/5273>

Privitelli, R. and Bezzina, C. 2007. "School-based self-evaluation: An Introductory study in a Maltese Church School" in *Journal of Maltese Education Research*, 5 (1): 22-43.

Pulis, A. 2010. A Study on School Self-Evaluation in Secondary State School in Malta (unpublished Master of Philosophy thesis, University of Aberystwyth).

Redfern, G. B. 1980. *Teachers and Administrators: A Performance Objectives Approach*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Reid, K., Hopkins, D. and Holly, P. 1987. *Towards the Effective School: The Problems and Some Solutions*. London: Basil Blackwell.

Reynolds, D., Creemers, B., Hopkins, D., Stoll, L. and Lagerweij, N. 1996. *Making Good Schools*. London: Routledge.

Rogers, G. and Badham, L. 1992. *Evaluation in Schools*. London: Routledge.

Stoll, L. and Fink, D. 1996. *Changing Our Schools*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Stoll, L. and Mortimore, P. 1997. "School effectiveness and School improvement" in White, J. and Barber, M. (eds). *Perspectives on School Effectiveness and School Improvement*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.

Stufflebeam, D. L., Madaus, G. F. and Kellaghan T. 2000. *Evaluation Models: Viewpoints on Educational and Human Services Evaluation*. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Vella, M. 1997. "The self-evaluating school" in Muscat, J. (ed.). *Towards the New Millennium: The Changing Role of the Head*. Malta: MUT Publications.

Wagner, R. 1989. *Accountability in Education*. London: Routledge.

Wilcox, B. 1981. "Evaluation in a local Education Authority: Reflections on practice and theory" in Smetherham, D. (ed.). *Practising Evaluation*. Driffield: Nafferton Books.

Winch, C., 1997. "Accountability, controversy and school effectiveness research" in White, J. and Barber, M. (eds). *Perspectives on School Effectiveness and School Improvement*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.

Wroe, A. and Halsall, R. 2001. "School self-evaluation" in *Research in Education*, 65: 41-52.

A review of perceptions and expectations of three major stakeholders towards virtual learning in primary education in Malta

Loren Mercieca and Simon Caruana

authors' contact: Ms Loren Mercieca - lorenmercieca@gmail.com
Dr Simon Caruana - simc1202@gmail.com

This qualitative study aimed to identify key issues relating to virtual learning when compared to face-to-face learning in the context of family engagement within the primary education sector in Malta. Thus, the researchers aimed to explore the expectations of the school community, students and families, and the extent to which their perceptions vary from their experiences.

To ensure the meticulous conceptualisation of the research question, the 'Russian Doll Principle' and the 'Goldilocks Test' were implemented, formulating the research question:

'How does family engagement juxtapose between virtual learning and face-to-face learning, in primary education in Malta?'

The situation arising from the COVID-19 pandemic has alternated face-to-face teaching with virtual teaching and blended learning. Children have a fundamental human right to have access to education "independent of the environment in which it takes place – physical, digital or a combination of both" (European Commission, 2020: 8). The switch to e-learning brought about various challenges for educators, students, and their families. On the one hand teachers felt the need to broaden their horizons and shift their classrooms virtually. On the other hand, students and families had to learn how to use digital technologies, organise a learning schedule, control emotional instability while finding a balance with other usual daily responsibilities. This indicates a shift in the role of families with regards to their children's education. In face-to-face learning the role of the families was to broaden teaching outside the classroom by guiding students during homework, attending school activities, and motivating their children. During virtual learning their role has been extended "to become educators, mentors and supervisors as well as providers of a sense of security and comfort" (Sari et al., 2020: 96).

For children to thrive in school and life, much more is required than merely attending school. When parents are encouraged by teachers to be involved in their children's education (Yulianti et al., 2020) and children are supported at home whilst seeing their families interested in what they are learning, they will strive to achieve more. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that families carry a baggage that we might not be aware of.

The literature

Routes to virtual learning

The routes to virtual learning are categorised into five eras. The first era, which dates to the mid-1800s, comprised correspondence courses. This form of learning served as a learning opportunity for people from all walks of life. The introduction of new technology as a medium of communication between teachers and students brought about the next era. Students were now more in control of their learning. Technologies such as audio and video cassettes gave students the opportunities not only to play them at their convenience but also to “pause, play, rewind and fast forward learning sessions as they saw fit” (Attis, 2014: 39). The advancement in technology and the increase in internet use gave rise to the subsequent era where “learning was no longer place-dependent as long as the learner had access to a computer” (Attis, 2014: 40). The following era witnessed rapid developments which resulted in more accessible learning. The final era, which leads us to the present date, comprises collaboration across the globe as well as the emergence of a virtual school in Malta, thus ensuring that students “will still get the full experience and are not left behind in any way” (*Times of Malta*, 2020).

Theoretical standpoint

The theories of social learning emphasised the importance that learning occurs when interacting with others because learning and participation go hand in hand, both in and out of the classroom. Thus, the knowledge acquired within the social context is not limited to content but is extended to values.

L. Vygotsky, J. Piaget and A. Bandura are three influential theorists of social learning who, despite their diverging theoretical positions, all believed that the social world affects cognitive development.

Vygotsky emphasised that cognitive development occurs as a result of “a social process from birth onwards, is assisted by others (adults or peers) more competent in the skills and technologies available to the culture” (Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993: 62). Contrastingly Piaget believed that the child becomes socially progressive at the age of three or four months and is not social from birth. This social interaction occurs when the child starts imitating the gestures of adults. This imitation process leads us to Bandura, who believed in the importance of social interaction through imitation and explained how “children primarily learn through imitation

of models in their social environment and that the primary mechanism driving development is observational learning” (Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993: 62).

As stated by Hurst et al. (2013), “social interaction is vital to the learning process” (p. 376) and results in collaborative learning both within a class environment as well as during virtual learning. Within a classroom environment, during group work, students observe, imitate, and interact with their peers as well as enhance their knowledge through scaffolded activities with the more knowledgeable adult (the teacher). During virtual learning, through platforms such as MS TEAMS®, students can still work in groups in breakout rooms. The difference between the two environments is that in a classroom environment the teacher is physically present with all the groups at the same time, whereas within the breakout rooms the teacher can only be present with one group at a time. Besides, in a virtual learning environment, the social context is now extended to include the family context, since “how parents interact with their children at home is of great influence on the child’s performance” (Roy & Giraldo-García, 2018: 41).

However, different types of family involvement and engagement processes exist. Epstein et al. (2002) described six types of family involvement in the Framework, namely: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the school community. Epstein’s Framework indicated that for a child to grow and learn effectively a partnership must be formed with the family, the setting, and the community. Contrastingly, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s model of parental involvement (1997) addressed the reasons why families become or do not become involved, what families do when they are involved and how family involvement affects students’ outcomes.

Policy perspective

From a policies perspective the *Tomorrow’s Schools: Developing Effective Learning Cultures* report (Wain et al., 1995) and *The National Minimum Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999) both proposed the magnification of parental involvement to enhance students’ educational needs. The implementation of the policy ‘For All Children to Succeed’ led to the amendment of the Education Act, Cap. 327 (1988), underpinning various reforms including the home-school partnership. From solely involving parents within school committees, the importance of parental involvement is now being recognised as an essential benefit to the child. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (Ministry for Education and Employment,

[MEDEs], 2012) emphasised the importance of family engagement and high-quality teaching and learning, whereby “parents are key to the success of the curriculum” (p. 5) and “are considered important stakeholders in the educational journey of their children” (p. 31).

To support the NCF, the Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF) is gradually being implemented across various year groups. Digital literacy is also a key component of the LOF whereby learning outcomes for digital literacy take a cross-curricular approach. In April 2015 the Department of eLearning issued a green paper entitled ‘Digital Literacy: 21st Century Competences for Our Age’ to raise “awareness of the importance of digital literacy within the education framework in Malta and a chance to reflect and introspect on the teaching and learning process” (Department of eLearning, 2015: 4). The latest local policy initiative was launched in July 2021, whereby the Office of the Prime Minister introduced the Remote Working Policy to promote worker mobility for the benefit of the wider community. With the implementation of this policy, families who were employed within the Maltese Public Service and were working remotely could assist their children even more during virtual learning, thus enhancing family engagement.

The Maltese scenario

In March 2020 countries worldwide “embarked on what might amount to the largest simultaneous online learning exercise in human history” (The World Bank, 2020: 11). Locally, Legal Notices 41 of 2020, 77 of 2020, 229 of 2020, and 97 of 2021 relating to the Closure of Schools Order, impacted traditional face-to-face teaching and learning, and initiated virtual learning. At this stage the school community, families and students adjusted rapidly and found ways how to teach and learn in a digital age.

Because “the use of technology is not an option anymore, but it has become an essential need for effective teaching and learning” (MEDE, Director of Digital Literacy and Transversal Skills, 2020), efforts were made by all stakeholders involved, including the Government of Malta. Internet was provided to families who did not have access, printed material was made available to families without printing devices and digital devices such as tablets and laptops were also distributed to those in need. Teleskola.mt was another initiative introduced by MEDE to assist families, students and educators with video-recorded lessons and resources. Furthermore, a virtual school was launched in November 2020. Approximately 600 primary students who were vulnerable or whose guardians were vulnerable attended this school.

Despite all these initiatives, instances were indicating that there were some families, students and educators who were still experiencing difficulties in engaging effectively with online modes of learning. Further down in this paper an attempt to uncover these difficulties is carried out using an in-depth study.

Methodology

To ensure the “overall feasibility” (Cohen et al., 2018: 173) of the study, four stages were followed (Table 1). After establishing the type of information required from the research, as well as the characteristics and the number of participants needed, a qualitative approach was selected.

Stage 1
1. Establish what to research
2. Identify the purpose of the research
3. Who shall benefit from the research?
Stage 2
1. What data is required?
2. How shall data be collected?
3. Time Frames
Stage 3
1. Select the research question
2. Identify the research method
3. Plan for ethical issues
4. Select participants
5. Carry out the research
6. Process and analyse data
7. Validate data
Stage 4
1. Write up and report the research
2. Present findings

Table 1: The Sequence of Research Strategies
Note: Adapted from “Research Methods in Education” by Cohen et al. (2018: 195)

Research Methods

Interviews

Qualitative research methods were used, where data was collected using structured interviews. Face-to-face interviews were chosen since this technique allows participants to speak their minds while the interviewer can take note of their nonverbals. The interviews comprised questions that were “straightforward” (Cohen et al., 2018: 520) while reflecting the objectives of the study. Structured interviews were prepared, and these were addressed to the school community (three teachers, one Learning Support Educator and one member from the Senior Leadership Team), three families and three students. Most of the questions were open-ended; however, a few were close-ended, in which case the participants were asked to specify or elaborate further. Each interview was recorded, and the interviewer took briefing notes.

Participants

Focusing on how the power of family engagement contrasts between virtual learning and face-to-face learning, this study examined the views of members from three groups: school personnel, family, and students.

As stated in the NCF (MEDE, 2012: 43), when exploring different opinions of families and educators, students can perform better, improve their self-esteem, become more responsible and get along better with their peers. The last group focuses on the students’ perspectives. Various studies stated that “children’s voices are hardly heard” (European Agency, 2021: 51), and “international organisations recommend respecting children’s rights by listening to their voices and encouraging their participation in public decisions” (European Agency, 2021: 52).

Initially, Heads of Schools forming part of the researched College Network were provided with an information sheet via email, outlining the purpose of the approved project together with information about the research project. In all 11 participants were required (Fig. 1) and those interested were asked to send an email. The selected participants were chosen since they represent the three major stakeholders of education.

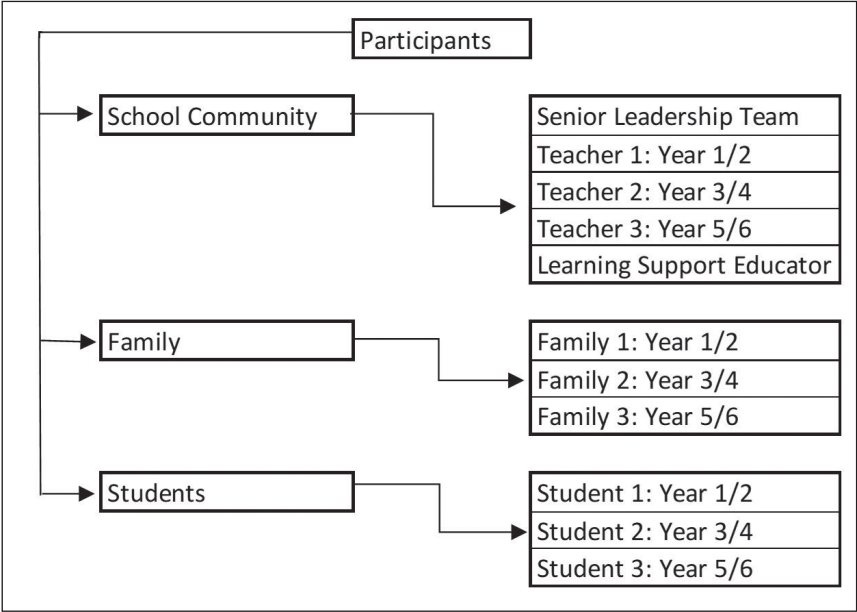


Fig. 1 – The participants

A nonprobability sampling strategy was used in this study, namely the Maximum Variation Purposive Sampling Method. This involved “selecting candidates across a broad spectrum relating to the topic of study” (Eitkan et al., 2016: 3) to explore and evaluate the expectations and experiences arising out of families and schools and the overall effect on the major stakeholders, who are ultimately the students. This sampling technique ensures that the selected participants provide the researcher with the necessary information. Selected interviewees were considered eligible for the study if they experienced and were knowledgeable about both face-to-face and virtual learning. Also, they had to be willing to participate, were accessible, able to communicate their experiences and express their opinions.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institute for Education [IFE] and MEDE, and “measures that safeguard the interests of those who help with the investigation” (Denscombe, 2010: 331) were taken.

The participants

Primarily participant information sheets and consent forms were sent to all participants and returned duly completed and signed via email or post. The researcher made sure that the privacy of the participants was ensured. This protection takes two forms: anonymity and confidentiality. No identifying information was disclosed, and participants were referred to as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3 etc. Furthermore, "the identity of the school or setting being researched is also concealed" (Schembri & Sciberras, 2020: 46). Confidentiality was also guaranteed as the data collected was kept in confidence and not released in any way that permits linking individuals to specific responses. In this study parents or guardians were encouraged to be present during the online interview with students. Before the interview parents were informed about their role during the interview and suggested ways in which, should the need arise, they could assist their child.

Structured interviews

Even though all participants submitted a signed informed consent and assent form, before the interview, they were orally reminded that the interview was being recorded for transcription purposes. The original recordings were stored on a personal laptop which is password protected, thus restricting access to the data. Furthermore, to ensure privacy, antivirus software was installed on the laptop. After interviews were transcribed verbatim they were sent to the participants for verification and validation.

Data analysis

Cohen et al. (2018) explained that analysing data involves three steps: data reduction, data coding and data management. To analyse data the thematic analysis approach by Braun & Clarke (2006) was used, where data was reduced, coded and managed in six phases.

Phase One to Six

Initially, before transcribing the data, familiarisation takes place by listening to each recorded interview. Subsequently interviews should be transcribed verbatim, and each transcript needs to be read several times while taking initial notes. Once the transcription process is finalised "an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting about them" is generated, which aids the organisation of "data into meaningful groups" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 18). The third phase entails searching for

themes where “the focus shifts from the interpretation of the individual data items within the dataset to the interpretation of aggregated meaning and meaningfulness across the data set” (Byrne, 2021: 13). In the fourth phase themes are checked in relation to the initial ideas (Level 1) and the coded categories (Level 2). The fifth phase, ‘define and refine’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 22) follows the notion of ‘the keyness of a theme’ (referred to in phase three). In this process the emerging themes identified the characteristics of the teaching and learning environment. The sixth and final phase involves finalizing the report.

Discussion of findings

Each categorised theme was reorganised into different subheadings, as illustrated in Fig. 2.

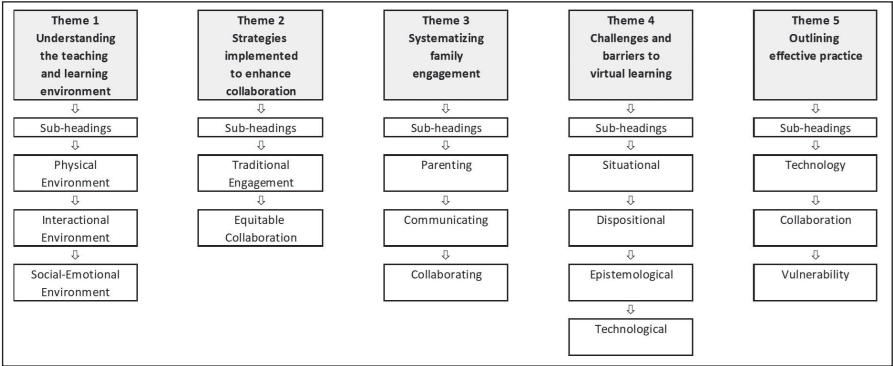


Fig. 2 – Organisation of Themes

Once the data was organised into five themes, it served the purpose of reviewing how family engagement contrasts between virtual learning and face-to-face learning in primary State schools in Malta.

Theme 1: Understanding the Teaching and Learning Environment

Participants had different views of what the teaching and learning environment entails. From the research carried out the teaching and learning environment can be categorised into three sections. For students the teaching and learning environment is mainly concerned with the interactional environment. As stated by Student 2 the teaching and learning environment is about “talking and playing with my friends and carrying out tasks given by the teacher”. On the other hand families gave great importance to the school’s physical environment. Family 2 described how in their child’s school “there are many gardens

around the courtyards, there is a lot of open space". Although to the school community the focus was on the children's academic progress, Teacher 2 stated that "education is not just about teaching subjects, the development of one's character is important as well". In the classroom environment establishing a relationship of trust, a sense of worth and belonging are vital. However, all the participants viewed the teaching and learning environment as solely involving the teachers and the students, leaving out the families. The participants' responses revealed that they do not value family engagement, but "when parents are engaged and involved, everyone – students, parents, and families, teachers, schools, and communities – benefit, and our schools become increasingly rich and positive places to teach, learn and grow" (Ministry of Education, 2010: 5).

Theme 2: Strategies Implemented to Enhance Collaboration

Even though a Family Engagement Policy is an important strategy to enhance collaboration, a key weakness was that 50% of the schools researched still need to implement this policy.

Although schools may encounter families who are not willing to engage, families might have had previous negative experiences, as students themselves or with their children's previous teachers. On the other hand, some teachers may feel that engaging families can be stressful, because they might believe that families challenge their authority or question their decisions. Other teachers might see family engagement as an additional task to an already long list of responsibilities. To break down any barriers to family engagement and ensure that families feel welcomed and valued, schools used different strategies, namely traditional engagement strategies and equitable engagement strategies.

According to Cutajar (2016), enhancing "a positive relationship... can be achieved if heads of school in collaboration with their senior management team and teachers work more on communication strategies" (p. 65). As illustrated in Fig. 3 results indicated that the most common mode of communication used in virtual learning was email, followed by MS TEAMS®. On the other hand, participants from all three groups stated that during face-to-face learning they mostly used MS TEAMS and the telephone to communicate.

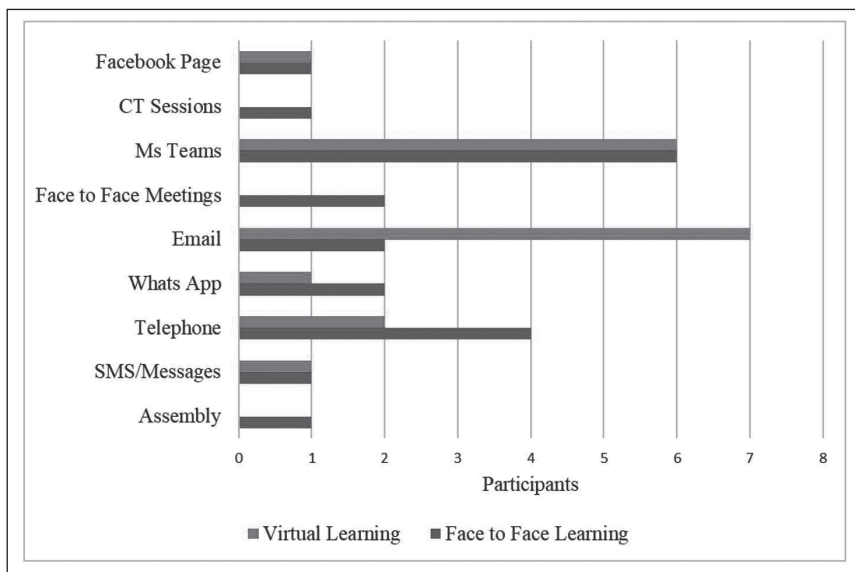


Fig. 3 – Means of Communication Used

Theme 3: Systematising Family Engagement

In their Framework Epstein et al. (2002) outlined six types of involvement. Results from this research indicated that parents and families were engaged in three ways: parenting, communicating and collaborating.

The results yielded were in line with the research carried out by Bonal et al. (2020), who described how “family support was higher in the case of younger children” (p. 647), and by Daniela et al. (2021), who declared that “students in younger classes needed more continuous support” (p. 6). It is interesting to note that during virtual learning students were asked less about what they were learning when compared to face-to-face learning. This is because, as Family 1 declared, “I used to assist my child a lot, I used to stay with him from morning to evening. I used to know what was going on all the time.”

Findings also revealed that although most students received some form of assistance, others were not assisted during their learning process. The assistance provided to students varied between face-to-face learning and virtual learning. Family 2 and Family 3 mentioned that while they assisted their children during homework and helped out with projects, they found it difficult to help their children during virtual learning. Both respondents were teachers, and since they also had to teach online, their

work interfered with their children's learning. Students in this study were asked by whom they were supported during virtual learning, and similar to the findings of Daniela et al. (2021) "most of the support was provided by mothers" (p. 6).

Communicating involved the parents and the teacher during both types of learning. In face-to-face as well as in virtual learning parents felt at ease asking the teacher for an explanation. Whereas during virtual learning families seemed more willing to suggest activities to the teacher, during face-to-face learning families asked the teacher for additional or adapted work. Both during face-to-face and virtual learning parents sought the support of other families and assisted each other.

Theme 4: Challenges and barriers to virtual learning

Studies carried out by Rubenson (1986), Garland (1993), and Schilke (2001) identified five categories of barriers to virtual learning, namely: situational, institutional, dispositional, epistemological and technological. From the data collected in this study and in line with these categories the participants identified: situational barriers, dispositional barriers, epistemological barriers and technological barriers.

Situational barriers emanated from the learners' life situations. The most common challenge was that family members were working from home and thus finding quiet places proved to be problematic. Dispositional barriers related to the student's personality. Findings revealed that the most common challenge was the motivation to carry out tasks. Another dispositional challenge encountered was the element of distractions such as playing with toys and eating. Epistemological barriers occur because of the content, structure, or description of a course. Findings from this study revealed that teachers spent much more time preparing for virtual lessons than for traditional classroom lessons. On the other hand, students mentioned that during virtual learning they had limited access to school supplies such as their maths tools box, where they normally use a large number of bottle caps during face-to-face numeracy activities. Findings also revealed that participants found it more difficult to understand and complete tasks during virtual learning. Technological barriers are challenges related to the availability and use of technology. Findings revealed that the main technological cause of concern was internet access. Students in Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6 were all supplied with a tablet from MEDE. On the other hand, students who had no devices or internet connection were provided with the necessary resources by the same ministry.

Theme 5: Outlining effective practice

Findings revealed that despite the hasty transition to move traditional classrooms to online classrooms, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, effective practices were implemented during the period of virtual teaching and learning continuity. As outlined by participants, such practices include the use of technology, enhanced collaboration, continuity for the vulnerable and advantages over traditional class practices.

Teachers strived to enhance students' motivation through increased and better use of Power Point Presentations and video clips, which also served beneficial to teachers, as they improved their own knowledge and use of technology. Student 2 also pointed out that during virtual learning "it is easier to answer questions, as students do not blurt out answers". Findings indicated that communication between families and the school community improved and parental support increased. Participants mentioned how vulnerable students and students who were ill could continue with their educational journey during virtual learning.

Overall view

The research question presented to the participants was "How does family engagement juxtapose between virtual learning and face-to-face learning, in primary education in Malta?"

Findings indicated that whereby in face-to-face learning the importance was based on participation, interaction, and individual attention, in virtual learning importance was attributed to the continuation of the syllabus. Findings also brought to light that more effort is needed to establish a school-home relationship because the majority felt that no parental evaluation was carried out to establish whether parents were satisfied with the school communication system, the curriculum, the physical activities, the mental health support offered and whether parents were involved in decision making. When asked 'Which of the following would you consider retaining when returning to normal life: online learning only, blended learning, face-to-face in the classroom only?', participants mostly preferred face-to-face classroom only, followed by blended learning. This is because "blended learning still needs to be improved, especially the interaction between teachers and students" (Sulisworo et al., 2016: 33); however, "students who learn from the combination of online and face-to-face modes develop better learning outcomes than their peers exposed to either of the modes exclusively" (Poquet et al., 2015: 74).

Essentially this study revealed that Maltese families were engaged during face-to-face as well as during virtual learning, with the main view being that while families “understand the need to maintain health measures... students should return to the full educational curriculum” (*Times of Malta*, 2021).

Conclusion

The findings of this research study were systematised into three categories: the school community, families, and students. Findings indicated that the school community is not solely interested in students’ academic progress, but it also considers students’ holistic development as essential. Through virtual learning families who assisted their children also got a better view of what the students are learning and realised “that what is happening in the classroom can be done at home” (Hall, 2020: 14). Results from this study revealed that although most students were supported by their families during face-to-face and virtual learning, the type and level of support varied. Overall this research indicated that virtual learning enhanced family engagement.

The future of virtual learning

Similar to Etherington (2008) the authors believe that as an educational medium, virtual learning “will continue to undergo dramatic and continual change” (p. 32) and aspire that once the COVID-19 period becomes history, we will not just return to pre-COVID teaching and learning practices but families will also be given the right and opportunity to select the mode of learning for their children.

Recommendations for practice

Similar to the research carried out by Jewitt et al. (2011) this research “provides a rationale and starting point for those schools who would like to explore and how they might want to” (p. 13) engage families both during face-to-face learning and during virtual learning.

As described by Hall (2020) an important step would be the implementation of “a workshop for all the families inside the classroom to partake in this family engagement opportunity” (p.13), which could set the ball rolling for a College Network-wide family engagement. This can be achieved by inviting other families, such as those who participated in this research, to share their experiences and how their engagement impacted their children’s life. Another important step is to

ensure that strategies implemented reach and represent all families, thus multilingual material and resources should be developed, while school communities should be representative of diverse families, including those with limited education.

Through the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity (2017) Malta has developed a 'Positive Parenting National Strategic Policy 2016-2024' (Abela et al., 2017). On a broader scale this policy can be reformed along the same lines as countries like Slovakia and Ireland, to include "guidelines for... parents on how to better support their children in education" (European Agency, 2021: 50). Another initiative that Malta could adopt, which is already implemented by Canada, would be the setting up of a "Parent Engagement Office... [which] continues to build awareness among parents of the importance of parent engagement" (Ministry of Education, 2010: 20).

As stated by Attis (2014) "teaching programs should not only prepare teachers to teach in a traditional setting but also in an online environment" (p. 149), through the implementation of "online teaching curricula [as well as] online teaching experience" (p. 152). Furthermore, induction programmes should include "resources focused on teacher communication with parents" (Ministry of Education, 2010: 18), thus warranting more educators who are prepared for this mode of teaching.

Concluding remarks

This study outlined the strategies implemented to enhance collaboration, provided a better understanding of how families are engaged, presented the challenges encountered and the initiatives which enhanced family engagement. "The pivotal role of the teacher in supporting learning with or without the aid of e-Learning tools" (Wright, 2010: 20) together with "increased parental involvement results in increased student success, enhanced parent and teacher satisfaction, and improved school climate" (Durisic et al., 2017: 149) thus create a more positive educational experience for everyone.

References

Abela, A. and Grech Lanfranco, I. 2017. *Positive Parenting National Strategic Policy 2016-2024*. Malta: Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity. doi:<https://family.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/National-Parenting-Policy-EN-8.02.17.pdf>

Attis, J. 2014. An Investigation of the variable that predicts teacher e-Learning Acceptance. (Doctor of Education dissertation, Lynchburg, Virginia, United States: Liberty University). <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>

Bonal, X. and Gonzalez, S. 2020. "The impact of lockdown on the learning gap: family and school divisions in times of crisis" in *International Review of Education*: 635-655. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11159-020-09860-z>

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. 2006. "Using thematic analysis in psychology" in *Qualitative Research in Psychology*: 77-101. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>

Byrne, D. 2021. "A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis" in *Quality & Quantity*: 1-22. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y>

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. 2018. *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge.

Cutajar, M. 2016. "Sustaining parental engagement: a challenge to Maltese education leaders" in *Symposia Melitensia*: 53-67. <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/14921/1/sustaining%20parental%20engagement.pdf>

Daniela, L., Rubene, Z. and Rüdolfa, A. 2021. "Parents' Perspectives on Remote Learning in the Pandemic Context" in *Sustainability*, 13: 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13073640>

Denscombe, M. 2010. *The Good Research Guide for small-scale social research projects*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Department of eLearning. 2015. *Digital Literacy: 21st Century Competences for Our Age. The Building Blocks of Digital Literacy*. Malta: The Ministry for Education. <https://education.gov.mt/en/elearning/Documents/Green%20Paper%20Digital%20Literacy%20v6.pdf>

Đurišić, M. and Bunijevac, M. 2017. "Parental Involvement as an Important Factor for Successful Education" in *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 7: 137-153.

Epstein, J., Sanders, M., Simon, B., Salinas, K., Jansorn, N. and Van Voorhis, F. 2002. *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*. California: Corwin Press Inc.

Etherington, M. 2008. "E-Learning pedagogy in the Primary School Classroom: the McDonaldization of Education" in *The Australian Journal of Teacher Education*: 29-54. <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1501&context=ajte>

Etikan, I., Abubakar Musa, S. and Alkassim, R. 2016. "Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling" in *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*: 1-4. <https://www.sciencepublishinggroup.com/journal/paperinfo?journalid=146&doi=10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Ed. 2021. *The Impact of COVID-19 on Inclusive Education at the European Level: Literature Review*. Odense, Denmark: C. Popescu, ed. <https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/COVID-19-Impact-Literature-Review.pdf>

European Commission. 2020. *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Digital Education Plan 2021-2027*. Brussels: European Commission. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0624>

Farrugia, C. 2020. "600 students to be enrolled in a virtual primary school" in *Times of Malta* (4 Nov). <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/600-students-to-be-enrolled-in-a-virtual-primary-school.829516>

Hall, C. 2020. "The Impact of Family Engagement on Student Achievement" in *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research*, 22(2): 1-16. DOI <https://doi.org/10.4148/2470-6353.1327>

Hurst, B., Wallace, R. and Nixon, S.B. 2013. "The Impact of Social Interaction on Student Learning" in *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 52(4). https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol52/iss4/5

Jewitt, C., Clark, W. and Hadjithoma, C. 2011. "The use of learning platforms to organise learning in English primary and secondary schools" in *Learning, Media and Technology*, 36(4): 335-348. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233118261_The_use_of_learning_platforms_to organise_learning_in_English_primary_and_secondary_schools

Laws of Malta. 1988. Education Act 327. Malta: Ministry for Justice. <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/327/eng/pdf>

Ministry for Education and Employment. 2020. Teaching in the Digital Age. Director for Digital Literacy and Transversal Skills.

Ministry of Education. 1999. *Creating the Future Together: National Minimum Curriculum*. Malta: Ministry of Education.

Ministry of Education. 2010. *Parents in Partnership. A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools*. Ontario: Queen's Printer for Ontario. http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/pe_policy2010.pdf

Ministry of Education and Employment. 2012. *A National Curriculum Framework for All*. Malta: Salesian Press. <https://curriculum.gov.mt/en/Resources/The-NCF/Documents/NCF.pdf>

Poquet, O., Joksimovic, S., Kovanovic, V., Dawson, S., Gasevic, D. and Siemens, G. 2015. *The history and state of blended learning*. Alberta: Athabasca University. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313751703_The_history_and_state_of_blended_learning

Public Health Act. 2020. "Closure of Schools (Amendment) Order, 2020" in *Legal Notice 229 of 2020*. Malta. https://www.ey.com/en_mt/emergency-measures/update-28

Public Health Act. 2020. "Closure of School Order 2020 (Extension of Period of Closure)2 in *Legal Notice 77 of 2020*. Malta. <https://vallettalegal.com/resources/covid-19/legal-updates-closure-of-schools>

Public Health Act. 2020. "Closure of Schools Order, 2020" in *Legal Notice 41 of 2020*. Malta. <https://legislation.mt/eli/ln/2020/41/eng/pdf>

Roy, M. and Giraldo-García, R. 2018. "The role of parental involvement and social/emotional skills in academic achievement: Global perspectives" in *The School Community Journal*, 28(2): 29-26. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2019-04066-001>

Rubenson, K. 1986. "Distance education for adults: Old and new barriers for participation" in Van Enckevort, G., Harry, K., Morin, P. and Schutze, H. G. (eds). *Distance higher education and the adult learner: Innovations in distance education, 1*. Heerlen, the Netherlands: Dutch Open University.

Sari, D. and Maningtyas, R. 2020. "Parents' Involvement in Distance Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic" in *Proceedings of the 2nd Early Childhood and Primary Childhood Education (ECPE 2020)*. 487: 94-97. Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research. <https://www.atlantis-press.com/proceedings/ecpe-20/125946138>

Schembri, H. and Sciberras, C. 2020. "Ethical considerations and limitations when researching education in small island states" in *SENTIO*. https://sentiojournal.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Sentio_Issue_2_Articles_06.pdf

Schilke, R. A. 2001. "A case study of attrition in Web-based instruction for adults: Updating Garland's Model of Barriers to Persistence in Distance Education." <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/A-case-study-of-attrition-in-Web-based-instruction-Schilke/194596e9a388faa0160aa913028207081861392e>

Sulisworo, D. and Supadmi, R. 2016. "A Pedagogical Critical Review of Online Learning System" in *International Journal of Languages Education*, 4(2): 27. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306271960_A_Pedagogical_Critical_Review_of_Online_Learning_System

The World Bank. 2020. *How countries are using edtech (including online learning, radio, television, texting) to support access to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Washington: The World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/edutech/brief/how-countries-are-using-edtech-to-support-remote-learning-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

Times of Malta. 2021. "Time for school to go back to normal, parents say" in *Times of Malta* (6 Sep). <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/time-for-school-to-go-back-to-normal-parents-say.898657>

Tudge, J. and Winterhoff, P. 1993. "Vygotsky, Piaget and Bandura: Perspectives on the relations between the social world and cognitive development" in *Human Development*, 36(2): 61-81. <https://hhs.uncg.edu/hdf/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2017/11/jrtudge-vygotsky-piaget-and-bandura.pdf>

Wain, K., Attard, P., Bezzina, C., Darmanin, M., Farrugia, C., Psaila, A., Sammut, J., Sultana, R. G., Zammit, L. and Camilleri, R. 1995. *Tomorrow's schools: developing effective learning cultures*. Malta: Ministry of Education and Human Resources.

Wright, N. 2010. *e-Learning and implications for New Zealand schools: A literature review*. New Zealand: Ministry of Education. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242678065_e-Learning_and_implications_for_New_Zealand_Schools_A_literature_review

Yulianti, K., Denessen, E., Droop, M. and Veerman, G.-J. 2020. "School efforts to promote parental involvement: the contributions of school leaders and teachers" in *Educational Studies*: 1-16. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03055698.2020.1740978>

MALTA UNION OF TEACHERS

ISSN: 2311-0058

