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SFU EDUCATION GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION

ABOUT SFU EDUCATIONAL REVIEW JOURNAL

We respectfully acknowledge that at SFU's three campuses, where our journal is edited and distributed, we live, learn and work on the unceded traditional territories of the Coast Salish peoples including the Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, Musqueam, Semiahmoo, Kwantlen, Katzie, Kwikwetlem, Qayqayt and the Tsawwassen First Nations.

SFU Educational Review Journal is a graduate student run journal at Simon Fraser University and supports diverse scholarship in the field of Education. The journal is fully open access. Published work is licensed under *Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License*. The copyright for content in this journal is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the *SFU Educational Review*. We practice a double-blinded review process to ensure the highest quality of submissions. All of our issues are published online at www.sfuedreview.org and are publicly accessible. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the journal has published three issues since 2020. Following the graduation of the previous editorial team, a new team has been formed and endeavors to publish two issues annually. The editorial team includes Shaghayegh Bahrami, Jennifer Cummins, Chunhong Liu, Micheal Obakhavbaye, Anna Rumjahn, and Bahar Zandrazavi.

The *SFU Educational Review* published its inaugural first issue in the spring of 2007. Originally, the *SFU Educational Review* followed a traditional academic journal format; however, in 2012, the journal was redesigned in order to make it more welcoming and accessible. *SFU Educational Review's* mission, revised in 2024, is to advance diverse forms of knowledge by providing a forum of discussion and engagement with current issues in education. Through shared scholarship and research, it aims to contribute to pedagogical practices and intellectual discussions among the SFU Faculty of Education community and beyond.

Ultimately, our goals are to:

1. Support intellectual and academic freedom by publishing a diverse range of scholarship with regards to content and format.
2. Support graduate students and emerging scholars to find their academic voice and develop as scholars.
3. Engage SFU's Faculty of Education's community with other scholarly communities to enrich its multiplicity.
4. Re-establish editorial processes to align with the journal goals #1-3.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

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Introduction

Dear SFU Educational Review readers,

As the editorial team of *SFU Educational Review*, we remain committed to reimagining what it means to write, publish, and engage in academic work in the field of education. In our previous issue, we reflected on the colonial legacies embedded within academic publishing and outlined a decolonial vision that prioritizes multiplicity, inclusivity, and care. This Summer Issue marks an important continuation of that vision, not only in what we publish, but also in how we engage with our community of authors, reviewers, and readers.

Over the past months, our team has deepened our editorial practices through sustained reflection and new forms of public engagement. First, we have intentionally cultivated a caring and responsive editorial environment, regularly reflecting on how our interactions with authors and reviewers can be spaces of mutual respect and support, particularly for emerging scholars. We believe that healing and justice in publishing are not abstract ideals but must be enacted through everyday editorial decisions. Second, we have also begun engaging with wider academic communities to share and refine our editorial practices and philosophy. For example, our team recently presented at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education's (CSSE) annual conference, a conversation we will revisit in greater detail later in this editorial. This represents our efforts to explore how open scholarship can foster togetherness, care, and healing in publishing. Third, we are currently organizing a community-centered symposium to be held later this year at Simon Fraser University, centered around the theme of *community-engaged research in education*. With this symposium, we hope to further extend the values of openness, solidarity, and relational accountability by creating a welcoming space for researchers, especially graduate students and early-career scholars, to share knowledge rooted in lived experience, cultural practice, and local relevance.

Across these efforts, our focus remains on reconfiguring academic publishing as a space of collective inquiry and ethical engagement, rather than competition and standardization. We continue to ask: *How can we center community, healing, and justice in the infrastructures of academic knowledge-making?*

In the sections that follow, we share a reflection on our participation in the CSSE 53rd annual conference, where we presented our vision for healing- and care-oriented publishing. We then introduce the pieces included in this issue which feature a wide range of voices, questions, and methodologies that contribute to ongoing conversations in education research. We conclude with a reaffirmation of our commitment to fostering inclusive, dialogic, and community-based knowledge-making.

Reporting from the Field

Over the Summer of 2025, our editorial team had the chance to present at the CSSE 53rd annual conference. Held at George Brown College in Toronto, Ontario, this year's congress

theme was ‘reframing togetherness’. We were delighted to present with the Canadian Association for Social Justice Education (CASJE) through a themed discussion entitled “Towards Open Scholarship: Reframing Togetherness in Academic Writing and Publishing”. Our time was guided by the central question: *How can we approach academic writing and publishing differently in the pursuit of decolonization?*

We contended that the process of decolonizing academic writing and publishing requires courage to embrace a messy process of un/becoming. At its core, this shift is characterized by unlearning dominant individualistic, neoliberal approaches to scholarship, embracing collective scholarship, and fostering community. Current challenges include the commercialization of academic publishing and the impacts of marketization and globalization on academia reproducing dominance in English and Western publishing norms (Curry & Lillis, 2018). Certain ways of knowing are then privileged, while others are marginalized or erased. Even these marginalized voices are expected to justify their significance and scholarly value by aligning with Western epistemological standards (Sugiharto, 2023).

By sharing how SFU Educational Review collectively moved towards open scholarship in our lived practices, our presentation explored how the many choices involved in the publishing process. From writing styles to review process, article selection to editorial role descriptions—we investigated aspects of journal organization and management could be re-envisioned to reshape writing and publishing practices for a more inclusive and decolonizing academic future. Being intentional with our day-to-day organizational decisions and structures, as well as reflecting on challenges that we have worked through as a group demonstrates our commitment to healing and justice in academic publishing. This remains at the core of who we are and how we respond to each other, our authors, reviewers, and community at large. We ended our presentation with an open discussion with our audience members. The following questions informed our dialogue: (a) How can we approach academic writing and publishing differently in the pursuit of decolonization and to pursue epistemic equity? (b) What are some examples you have seen in other journals? and (c) What ideas can we apply to SFU Educational Review?

As a journal that supports diverse forms of scholarships, the emerging nature of working with such a vast range of authors and ideas creates opportunities for us to meaningfully dialogue on what scholarship means for scholars at SFU and beyond. We took the time to sit with the insights and suggestions from our audience in subsequent team meetings to evaluate how we could continue moving towards cultivating this platform as space for dialogue, communal healing, and collaborative growth. To that end, it was an honour to have the opportunity to share our co-created reflections and lived practices on the theme of ‘reframing togetherness’ with the CSSE and CASJE community.

Overview of Articles

The Summer 2025 issue of the SFU Ed Review continues to offer a diverse range of scholarship that spotlights the varied nature of research in the field of education and are highlighted below.

Ruo-Han Wang offers a haunting reflection on the lives of four generations of women in her family, each living through the challenges presented by the transition from imperial China to the "New China" of today. Written as a final farewell to her grandmother, Ruo-Han honours her relatives by inviting us to witness the *brokenness* created in them by their lived sociocultural contexts. She illustrates how education can create and perpetuate this brokenness, but she also considers how the commitment to *seeing* this brokenness—in others, and in ourselves, too—can serve as an act of healing.

Using a theoretical framework of epigenetic consciousness, **Eli Davis** weaves together theory, science, and personal narrative in their work *Epigenetic consciousness: Understanding historical trauma, identity formation, and the path to transformational healing*. Davis outlines research on the impact of intergenerational trauma on genetic structures due to racism and proposes a path forward for healing through culturally relevant and mindful practices. The paper concludes with recommendations that advance trauma-informed policy and practice in the field of education.

In *A Meta-Meta-Ethnographic Review of Qualitative Synthesis in Education*, **Tsoghik Grigoryan** introduces a novel analytical approach that draws on agential realism, sociomateriality, and rhizomatic thinking to synthesize qualitative research across digital and physical contexts. The study reveals a dynamic interplay within meta-ethnographic scholarship, emphasizing the entangled relationships among institutions, pedagogy, and technology. These insights offer valuable implications for future research, policy development, and educational practice.

In *Social Media and Films as Drivers of Public Awareness on Human Trafficking in Southwest Nigeria*, **Adekunle Emmanuel Makanjuola** and **Mary Mojirade Ayantunji** examine how social media platforms and films shape public understanding of human trafficking. Using quantitative analysis, their study reveals weak correlations between passive media consumption and awareness levels, highlighting the need for stronger policy initiatives focused on critical media literacy. They conclude with recommendations for institutional policies and practices aimed at leveraging film and social media more effectively for public education.

Conclusion

As we bring this issue to a close, we return to the commitments that guide our work as a student-led editorial team: to foster spaces of openness, care, and collective reflection in academic publishing. The conversations and contributions featured in this issue echo our belief

that scholarly writing is not merely a matter of format or output, but a deeply relational practice that requires attentiveness to voices, differences, and the ways we co-construct knowledge.

We invite you, our readers, to engage with the articles in this issue not only as finished pieces of research, but as ongoing invitations to think with, to question, and to feel. May your reading be guided by curiosity, grounded in reflection, and open to the multiplicity of ways we write, know, and imagine together.

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WORKS OF ART AND OTHER ACADEMIC PIECES

EDUCATION AS WOUND AND WITNESS: A NARRATIVE ACROSS FOUR GENERATIONS OF CHINESE WOMEN

RUO-HAN WANG

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Abstract

This narrative offers a gentle yet profound meditation on a family history that spans over a century, beginning with a long farewell to the author's maternal grandmother, Laolao. Through the experiences of four generations of women in a Chinese family, this story offers a historically textured, deeply personal lens on the meaning of education within a broader sociocultural context. My mother, who received what was considered a modern education, emerges as the most disconnected and, assumably, the most broken among the four women. This story gently unravels the unintended consequences of education when wielded as a tool of dominance—showing how it can dehumanize and wound, rather than liberate. Yet, amidst the rupture, I find a path toward reconciliation through the quiet power of seeing. By bearing witness to the past of an individual, a family, and even a society, one may awaken the capacity to forgive, heal, and reclaim agency. Departing from traditional academic structure, this piece unfolds through narrative. It begins with a deeply personal story and gradually zooms out, unrolling a scroll from the past that invites readers to embark on a shared journey of reflection and rediscovery.

Keywords: institutionalized brokenness, power of seeing, healing, reconciliation, education, historical lens.

Positionality Statement

This writing is grounded in narrative and autoethnographic inquiry, drawing from my lived experiences as a great-granddaughter, granddaughter, and daughter, situated within a lineage of Chinese women whose lives have been profoundly shaped by socio-historical forces. Starting from this intergenerational journey, I reflect on the multifaceted meanings of education, not merely as an abstract ideal, but as something embodied, internalized, and contested in everyday life. As both a researcher and participant in this family story, I weave together personal memory and philosophical reflections. The value of these reflections lies not in objective distance but in the immediacy of memory as lived and felt—subjective, relational, and emotionally informed. This approach aligns with a body of work in narrative inquiry and arts-based research that honors personal voice as a mode of knowledge production (Leggo, 2000; Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005). This approach seeks a slower, more contemplative manner of knowing in contrast to what conventional academic work allows. In addition to witnessing the family history, I invite readers to contemplate how the act of storytelling can lead to reconciliation, healing, and a quiet kind of wisdom that helps us carry forward through the complexities of life and inherited pain.

Opening: The Long Goodbye

I dreamed of my *Laolao* (my maternal grandmother) in late March 2023. She hugged me in her warm arms for a long time, as if I were still the little girl by her side. Then she whispered, “Goodbye.” Was it her farewell to me? I woke up smiling like a baby and the warmth stayed with me for a while, until I realized it was the first time she had come to my dreams since 2005, the year she passed away.

My *Laoye* (my grandfather, *Laolao*’s husband) passed away in the winter of 2003, two decades earlier, during my second year at university, when I was living away from my family in a different city. My mom told me the news over the phone and directed me to stay on campus because, “Schoolwork is the most important thing in your life now. Don’t come back for the trivia.” I begged bitterly but was silenced with a threatening tone, “If you don’t obey me, you know the consequences!”—the typical response Chinese parents use to stop their children from doing anything unwanted. Unable to calm down from the loss of a loved one, I went to the sports field at night to mourn in complete loneliness. The silent pain, intensified by the darkness, nearly devoured me. Why is saying a proper farewell to a beloved family member considered *trivia*?

A little over a year later, at the beginning of 2005, I received a text message from my mother, declaring the dreaded news: “Your mom doesn’t have a mom anymore.” The whole world collapsed in front of me. *Laolao* was a mom to me emotionally. She offered me the purest love I could ever have. Yet again, I was rejected by my biological mom and extended family from attending the funeral. It was once more deemed “trivia” compared to my schoolwork.

I often savored what *Laolao* (grandmother) said after *Laoye* (grandfather)’s death: “If the surviving spouse dies within a year of their partner’s death, their bond was one of true love indeed.” Was *Laolao*’s passing proof of their bond?

I now decide to write something for my *Laolao*, to bid the formal farewell that I never got

a proper chance to offer. Maybe that is why after all these years, some part of me still pretends to believe that they are alive. Each time Laolao and Laoye saw me off at the bus stop after my weekend visits, the moment imprinted itself on my heart and mind. As the bus pulled away, the two of them grew smaller and smaller, until a final turn erased them from view. With them, time slipped away, and so did a part of me. I owe them a farewell.

Four Generations of Women in a Chinese Family

My *Taitai* (Laolao's mom, my great grandmother) was born at the beginning of the 1900s, when the two-thousand-year-old imperial regime was clinging to its last breath. She came from an affluent landowning family in a province in central China. At the age of six, she lost her voice and hearing due to illness, which drastically devalued her in the future marriage market. In her teenage years, her father wedded her—accompanied by a huge dowry and land—to an impoverished peasant in the hope that she would be treated well by the lower-class husband and live a wealthy life. However, this prosperous overnight “landlord” was stunned by the easy fortune and soon lost himself to the “career” of gambling.

Taitai's only worth in that house was to produce sons to carry on a family name that was not hers. Unfortunately, the first births were all girls. Every time, her husband, this “father,” grabbed the feet of the newly born baby girl—who hadn't yet opened her eyes—and drowned her in the chamber pot without any hesitation. Then came my Laolao. As usual, this father—no, this murderer—pulled the baby from her desperate mother the moment he learned she was another girl. He held Laolao upside-down over the chamber pot, which gave off an overwhelming stench, but paused at the last second. Withdrawing his hand, he said, “Maybe I do need a girl to do the house chores, so that I can save money from hiring servants. What's even better, she can take care of my future sons.” Nobody knows what changed in that heartless man at the last moment. Laolao's life was spared, but her destiny was sealed.

Strangely enough, after Laolao's birth, her mother never gave birth to any girls thereafter. Instead, she gave birth to four boys. The youngest was the same age as Laolao's first child. Laolao, as expected, grew up doing all the house chores and caring for her brothers. “I was very *useful*. I could do the work of several people,” Laolao once recalled. It seemed that, being *useful*, was the highest compliment for a woman—sentiment and flesh—could hope to earn.

Laolao was very close to her mother. They visited each other frequently to provide emotional support. Laolao never got over the regret of not seeing Taitai one last time before she passed away, a regret that I inherited when Laolao's earthly life came to an end many years later. Taitai's health deteriorated rapidly before a Chinese New Year, but my Laoye asked the entire family to hide this news from Laolao until the New Year holiday was over. “Let's not ruin her mood for the New Year,” Laoye claimed “thoughtfully” for Laolao, as my mother recalled. Laolao was devastated to learn that her beloved mom had passed away while the rest of her family was celebrating the commencement of a new year. She could not even hold back her tears when she was telling me this piece of history decades after Taitai's death. She almost never mentioned her father, not even to her children.

Nobody now alive remembers Taitai's name, as though her identity was never meant to be known or remembered. What I do know is a piece of information passed down from Laolao:

Taitai's brother received an elite education and eventually became the president of one of the earliest universities established in the 20th century in China. A girl and her brother were born into the same household, yet their life trajectories diverged entirely: one silenced because of her gender, the other uplifted and honored. Fate was not shaped by merit or character, but by the simple fact of being born a girl or a boy.

Laolao was born in 1932, seventeen years before the founding of the New China in 1949. One day at age sixteen, while Laolao was helping out with some work in a relative's house, Laoye's mother happened to pass by and was impressed by Laolao's hard work and good looks. She found a matchmaker to make a proposal for her youngest son, who was nineteen years old. Laolao's father agreed. Following an arranged marriage, Laolao and Laoye moved to the capital of the province. They both worked in the local steel plant. Laolao gave birth to six children, two daughters and four sons, the second oldest and the youngest of whom died of pneumonia in their infancy. Laolao and Laoye never showed preference for sons or daughters. Perhaps out of compassion, or habit, or both, Laolao never asked her children to share the responsibility of the house chores. When her youngest daughter, my mother, cried miserably and refused to go to kindergarten, Laolao gave up her cherished job, the first thing in her life that had granted her anything close to equal social standing with her male counterparts.

Laolao continued taking care of her children's children in the 1980s and 1990s. I was born in the 1980s, shortly after the Maoist Era, when China moved into a new historic age of rapid industrialization and urbanization. It was a turning point in modern Chinese history when the one-child policy was implemented in 1980. Like most urban families, both my parents were encouraged to work for the development of the vibrant new country, and I was among the millions of my peers who grew up in their grandparents' homes. Though my mom's office was nearby, she could only visit occasionally for a couple of hours. She once showed up with a bag full of pricey snacks, insisting I eat those rather than what she dismissively called the "cheap" food Laolao had prepared.

Whenever I desperately asked my mother if I could go home with her, she pointed to a picture on the wall, saying: "Look at the pretty and adorable girl. She's your older sister. She's the top student in a school in Beijing (the capital city of China). She's very hardworking and good at everything. Your dad and I have to take care of her. I'm not your real mother. I found you in a trash can." At first, Laolao did not debunk her prank remarks. When time passed by and my mom added more and more details about that girl's life, Laolao told me it was a joke and suggested to my mom that she should stop. It turned out that the picture was just a poster for decoration. But by then, I was already deeply confused. For years I believed I had a sister who was much better than me in every possible aspect. I still cannot understand my mother's "humor" today. Why did she find it funny to crush a child's sense of belonging and self-confidence?

Laolao, on the contrary, was very warm, patient, and encouraging. "I know you were trying to help. I see your good heart," she would say—even when I caused trouble. She was never reluctant to express her love for me. She cuddled me in her arms and told me bedtime stories. She was like a real mom to me. Laolao was the only person who made me feel safe and whose love I did not have to earn. I believe Taitai played a similar role in Laolao's life.

I loved her back wholeheartedly. Once I saved one week's breakfast money, given to me

by my parents (my only source of income then) and bought Laolao a towel as her birthday gift. Laolao hugged me warmly and kissed my cheeks. She held the simple gift so dearly that she couldn't stop weeping. During traditional Chinese festivals, she made exquisite handcrafts for all her grandchildren and taught us customs and folktales, which were considered outdated by my mother who received a "modern and scientific education," as it was called. I still remember my mother's resistance to almost every piece of Laolao's advice. "What do you know? You did not have any education!" She would bluntly interrupt Laolao and exit the room, leaving Laolao in silence.

It is true that like Taitai, Laolao never received formal schooling, but she influenced me so much more positively than my mother, who excelled in her school years and went through higher education after the Cultural Revolution, a decade-long sociopolitical upheaval in China that disrupted education. Laolao taught me love, care, dignity, and resilience through her practice, which has been the brightest light of my life, while my mom's arrogance and capriciousness make me wonder constantly what it truly means to be educated.

Education that Wounds

My parents' generation (born in the 1950s and 60s) received an education that was vividly shaped by the ideological and political climate of the time. After the founding of the New China (an expression commonly used in China to refer to the People's Republic of China) in 1949, the Communist Party implemented a series of new educational reforms aimed at consolidating its authority. These policies emphasized the dissemination of Marxist-Leninist ideology and the training of scientific and technical personnel to support national modernization, mainly following the Soviet model (Saywell, 1980). This approach reflected a distinctly instrumentalist model of education, in which schooling was viewed primarily as a means to serve national political and economic ends.

Although the educational model shifted several times in response to changing relations between China and the Soviet Union, its underlying instrumentalist nature remained intact. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), this instrumentalism took on a radical form. Students were sent to mountainous and rural areas to learn from peasants and workers before being permitted to attend universities. In this period, countless professors and intellectuals were persecuted, and many students were permanently deprived of access to higher education. University infrastructures were dismantled or repurposed, and students were encouraged to sever familial ties in favor of complete devotion to the revolutionary cause.

This period produced profound psychological and social consequences. Many young people became emotionally detached and ideologically radicalized. The relationships between the post-1950s-and-60s generation and their parents' generation grew strained, as the older generation were viewed as "relics" of a backward, unenlightened past that needed transformation. In place of traditional familial reverence, Chairman Mao was elevated as the "dearest person and greatest leader" by many youths, an embodiment of ideological purity instilled through systematic indoctrination. It was, in many ways, a quasi-religious period, in which Mao's image functioned as that of a god-like figure, and his followers saw themselves as righteous defenders of an absolute truth.

At the same time, as feminism had been introduced to China by the end of the 19th century and thrived in the first half of the 20th century (Ma, 2010), it perfectly catered to New China's need for more labor for industrialization. Hence, to eliminate the differences between men and women in the labor market, new slogans to further encourage the human capital of women were produced: "Women and men are equal!" "Women hold up half the sky!" (Bai, 2010). The bright side of this trend was that, with the endorsement of absolute authority, the social status of *working* women improved significantly, along with their family status and self-confidence. For the first time a huge number of women (mostly urban working females) gained their voices in the public sphere. That was a glimpse of my parents' educational background.

The successfully instrumentalized generation later inherited privileged access to social resources from their creators/predecessors and, today, continues to lead the country and educate the next generation in its most familiar way: authoritative, reductionistic, mechanical, and instrumentalized, to secure its power, while in reality, continuing to cause pain and struggle. The formerly oppressed were transformed into oppressors, as:

The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be man; but for them, to be man is to be oppressors ... the oppressed find in their oppressor the model of "manhood." (Freire, 1970/2000, pp. 45–46)

From a holistic point of view, the 1950s-and-60s generation in China was intentionally framed to become the very first generation of *empty vessels*: incomplete human beings mass-produced to fulfill the regime's goal of collective development. Their formation took place within a system that treated education not as a space for nurturing the mind and soul, but as a mechanism of ideological imprinting. They adopted a simplified and politicized language, marked by rigid dichotomies—black-and-white thinking and empty rhetoric. Common phrases such as *class enemy* and *fight to the last minute* permeated everyday speech and thought (Schoenhals, 2010; Xizhe, 2015), further amplifying the generation-wide emotional numbness and psychological fragmentation of their generation.

I propose the term *institutional brokenness* to name this entrenched pattern within top-down, authority-driven educational systems, where personal feelings and thoughts are often subordinated to externally imposed ideological goals. This structural condition creates a profound disconnection between a person's internal sense of being and the educational journey enforced upon them. Its symptoms are wide-ranging, including the fragmentation of identity, erosion of agency, loss of existential purpose, and the internalization of a sense of inadequacy or alienation.

It is no wonder that my mother, an obedient and stellar student among her peers, was shaped into someone who appears emotionally numb to me. She rarely shows her love or compassion to her family—not to her parents, her siblings, or her only child. I have long wondered if she has/feels *any* human emotions at all. In my experience, she follows mechanical doctrines without reflection; anything falling outside the narrow boundaries of her belief framework must be criticized and crushed without mercy. In this sense, it may not be entirely her fault. Rather, it may be the deep imprint of her own institutional brokenness that, unknowingly, caused her to pass on the trauma and rupture that ultimately fractured my childhood.

Also, as the first woman in this family lineage to gain access to formal schooling, my mom, though seen by many other women as a fortunate person, spoiled and protected by everyone around her, may in fact be the most broken one, at least from my perspective. Her world was constructed within a siloed mental space, where her fragmented personal feelings are the only valid reference. In my continued experience, she remains unaware of her emotional numbness to others and seems incapable of forming genuine emotional connections. Her way of coping with family tensions is to silence us with the coldest language and exit the room by slamming the door as if we were her “class enemy.” She tightly holds her ground and “fights to the last minute,” until we humbly surrender to her with apologies, apologies that validate her “honorable” pride.

My mother has *never* lost one battle on her family battlefield. Yet through her repeated triumphs, she may have lost something far more essential: the capacity to love and care, and along with it, the tangible experience of being loved and cared for. Her brokenness, as I see it, was not simply personal but systemic, largely shaped by the highly centralized, ideological education of her time. It gave her an incredible confidence, while simultaneously severing her emotional bonds with her family and blinding her with the illusion of scientific rationality. Education, in her case, did not liberate—it wounded, acting as what Audre Lorde (2004) would call the “master’s tool” (p. 1672).

Healing from the immense institutionalized brokenness has become a primary focus in my exploration of the field of education. This exploration, however, is not only theoretical—it grows out of the lived experiences of the women in my family.

Searching for the Light of Humanity

The four generations of women in my family—Taitai, Laolao, Mama (my mom) and I—were all born at the intersections of two historical eras. Taitai lived through the decline of the old centralized imperial regime, the revolution that sought to overthrow it, and her subsequent social outcast status. Laolao’s life spanned from the Republican era of Min Guo (民国:1912–1949) to the founding of the People’s Republic of China under the Chinese Communist Party in 1949. Mama was shaped by the Cultural Revolution and witnessed the later flourishing era marked by feminist movements and rapid industrialization. I was born at the shift from a period encouraging higher birth rates to the one-child policy (Gao, 2015; Kane & Choi, 1999). We have witnessed the tremendous transformations our ancient Chinese civilization has undergone in the past century, each through the lens of our lived experiences. Although our existential realities—that is, the conditions of our lived experience and personal meaning-making—differ, each of us traverses our own route of suffering and struggles. I am curious about what has sustained us respectively in our lives and across generations. I find traces of love and compassion in Taitai, Laolao, and myself, but I sense only numbness in Mama. Education plays a critical role in shaping these differences, though it is not the only force at work.

Taitai’s life was restricted to a geographically limited space. As a woman born into a world where she was seen as inferior and subordinate to her father and later her husband, she had little autonomy. Yet her capacity for kindness and love was preserved. She could not talk or hear, but she was able to build deep emotional bonds with her children. She liked to laugh and make snacks for her grandchildren. Nobody could imagine how much pain was hidden behind her

quiet optimism. Within her incredibly limited choices, she chose to become the light for herself and her children. That, to me, was the most courageous heroism.

Her only daughter, my Laolao, carried on with her light and handed it over to me. Despite all the knowledge I have learned, the books I have read, and the years of formal schooling I have been through, it is Laolao's embodiment of love and care, dignity and resilience, humility and compassion, and respect for traditional culture and customs that shines most brightly in my memory. Her presence has been a guiding imprint on my soul.

The so-called "education" that began from my parents' generation penetratingly intervened in the psyche, shaping minds in ways that often suppressed emotion and human connection. My mom and her countless peers who emerged from this system seemed to believe they belonged to something greater and nobler, a collective mission that promised to usher in a brighter future for their nation. I wonder if their success in gaining privilege over social mobility and resources has deluded them into believing their way is the only valid way of being. But such success can mask unseen wounds. While it may seem that Taitai, Laolao, and I are more able to recognize these fractures, I now understand that even this perception should be held with humility. After all, we are all conditioned by our upbringing and education, and none of us can fully escape the blind spots that come with such conditioning. Perhaps what differentiates our experiences is not the presence of suffering itself but the way we relate to it—one that invites reflection rather than defence.

So I propose that the first step toward healing, whether ourselves or others, is *seeing* the brokenness: an impaired ability to experience emotions and to connect, both inwardly with ourselves and outwardly with others. How can we repair a vase without seeing its cracks? How can we heal a heart without seeing the brokenness in it?

But how do we see our own brokenness? How do we obtain this wide awaken-ness (Greene, 2017)—a deepened state of consciousness and critical engagement with the world? These are not easy questions to answer. Yet the beginning of an answer, for me, lies in the act of *seeing*. The willingness to see is a gesture of care, care for ourselves, for others, and for our shared histories, through which we may begin to awaken from conditioned blindness and the deep imprint of institutional brokenness.

The Power of Seeing

Etymologically, the English word *see* originated from the old English word *seon*, meaning "be or become aware of by means of the eye," also, "perceive mentally, understand, experience" (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). To see, then, is to be/come aware of, to connect, to care. By seeing another being's existential reality, an emotional tie is formed, a possibility for compassion is created, and a space for interconnectedness is opened.

"If you saw me in the past, you would forgive me in the present," wrote Zhang Ailing, one of the most renowned female writers in the first half of the 20th century China, in her medium-length novel, *Love in a Fallen City* (2009, p.15). Ailing, herself, endured a deeply traumatic upbringing marked by familial neglect and emotional abandonment and never recovered in her life. Her words are not only a poetic expression of longing but also a call to see

a person not as a static figure frozen in the present moment, but as a living assembly of all their relations, geographically and chronologically. The act of seeing creates a bridge across generations and within fractured selves.

In the case of my family, I wonder: What might I have become if raised in my mother's circumstances? Would I have been able to carry on the light of humanity passed down from my ancestors, or would I, too, have been reshaped by the powerful bureaucratic power through education? If I had walked through Laolao's growing path, could I have found her strength to be as resilient and willing to care for my next generation? If I had been born as Taitai, would I have survived the unimaginable pain of watching my babies drowned, yet still held onto hope and compassion for my descendants?

I have no answer to any of those questions. I cannot fully know, as I grew up in a seemingly different social environment. But what I do know is that by learning their respective histories, something deeper than blood has begun to emerge: a broader sense of kinship that transcends time and context. I *see* the three women in the fullness of their existential realities. I *see* their brokenness. I *see* the past and present of the four of us. By seeing them, I see parts of myself that were once hidden. By seeing, I recognize the possibility of carrying forward the light of my ancestors into the realm of healing. By seeing, I learn to respect, and begin to forgive.

To truly see is not only to witness the visible wounds but to become attuned to those buried beneath the surface—traces of pain that live in silence. The act of seeing is intimately bound to the process of surrendering. In the quiet courage to see, the seeds of surrender begin to stir.

The Courage to be Broken: Surrender to Imperfection

Surrender is not a passive letting go, but an active, compassionate response to what has been seen and felt. It is an emotional and ethical gesture—an intentional holding of both the visible and the invisible, the broken and the enduring. In this light, surrender is not about relinquishing control, but about loosening our grip on perfection, making room for tenderness, humility, and healing. While the full unfolding of how surrender emerges from the clarity of seeing lies beyond the scope of this piece of writing, it remains a vital inquiry I hope to pursue in future work—especially as it relates to healing through imperfection and brokenness.

There is only one form of heroism in the world,

and it consists in seeing the world as it is—

and in loving it. (Rolland, 1912, p. 2)

Nothing created by humans is perfect. Human history has only proved that so-called “progress” often means replacing old problems with new ones. The history of my family's women over the past century illustrates that brokenness is not an anomaly but a constitutive part of human reality. In this light, the obsession for perfection becomes a source of further suffering, adding to the pain of our inherent imperfections.

A famous teaching from Buddhist tradition helps illuminate this point. The story goes:

Once, the Buddha and his disciple Ananda came across a princess who needed help to cross a river. While Ananda passed the young lady to keep distance, Buddha carried her across. The princess left without a word of thanks. A while after they parted ways, Ananda was still upset about her rudeness. He complained to his master: "The Princess should learn some proper manners." The Buddha replied: "Our disappointment is a result of our over-expectations." But Ananda wasn't convinced: "We carried her for such a long distance." "Dear Ananda," Buddha replied, "I put her down hours ago, why are you still carrying the burden?"

This story has often been read as a lesson in letting go of ego and resentment. But in the context of my own inquiry, it resonates more deeply as a metaphor for intergenerational trauma. The princess is not just a symbol of disappointment; she becomes the embodiment of unacknowledged brokenness, carried long after the event has passed. If trauma remains unseen and unhealed, it lingers like the burden in Ananda's mind, silently passed down across generations.

Our obsession with perfection, whether as individuals, families, or societies, mirrors the unseen weight. The longer we cling to it, the less space we allow for healing. But if we can surrender to the imperfect reality of our human condition, we may begin to open the cracks for light to enter. The cracks in brokenness open space for new connections, which has the potential to expand our circle of awaken-ness. As theologian Luis Gómez writes:

The world is not waiting to be transcended or transformed; it is not in need of redemption or reform by the holy or the divine; it is waiting to be recognized for what it is. The recognition, with the implied change in attitude and behavior, is what we call "liberation." (1993, p.189)

I wonder if this recognition of the broken reality and the quiet surrender to imperfection was the secret that enabled my Taitai and Laolao to preserve their resilience and humanity through immense suffering. Maybe their courage lay in their refusal to close their hearts.

Closing: Farewell and ...

I bid my formal farewell to my Laolao's earthly life. With deepest gratitude, I carry forward the light of humanity as part of her spiritual life, a light that continues to guide me as I keep searching for meaning in this broken reality.

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ARTICLES

EPIGENETIC CONSCIOUSNESS: UNDERSTANDING HISTORICAL TRAUMA, IDENTITY FORMATION, AND THE PATH TO TRANSFORMATIONAL HEALING

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Abstract

Classrooms sit at the fault line where ancestral pain meets present possibility. This conceptual article advances epigenetic consciousness—a lens that links intergenerational trauma to learner identity—through four intertwined pillars: Sankofa’s backward glance, critically sustaining homeplaces, neuroplastic rewiring, and narrative praxis. Drawing on neuroepigenetic evidence that racism leaves stress-responsive methylation marks (Yehuda et al., 2016) and on hush-harbor legacies of communal ritual, I argue that intentional breathing, restorative dialogue, and culturally rooted pedagogy can rewrite those molecular scripts. A brief autoethnographic vignette from Milwaukee anchors the science in lived experience, while recent imaging studies show classroom mindfulness increasing hippocampal density and down-regulating cortisol genes. Reframing inherited trauma as both imprint and invitation positions educators as molecular change-agents: they curate spaces where resilience becomes heritable and a new human, awake to structural forces yet poised for collective flourishing, can emerge. This synthesis lays groundwork for scholarship and practice that braid molecular biology, ancestral wisdom, and emancipatory teaching into a single score for transformative healing.

Keywords: epigenetics, critical race theory, Sankofa, culturally sustaining homeplaces, trauma-informed pedagogy, Paulo Freire, resilience

Introduction

Cracked Milwaukee sidewalks—each fissure a ledger of racialized neglect—taught me to decipher trauma’s silent grammar long before I could name it. My crew scavenged worn-out mattresses from boarded-up houses to flip off garage roofs and land in breathless laughter. Those filthy cushions spared our shins but never shielded us from the scarcity surrounding us; nevertheless, that improvisational joy signaled an older inheritance—resilience etched into cultural memory and, as emerging research suggests, into the methyl tags of our DNA (Post, 2021; Yehuda et al., 2016).

Emerging epigenetic research shows that lived experience toggles gene expression, illuminating how historical trauma travels across generations (Post, 2021; Yehuda et al., 2016). Building on this science, I advance epigenetic consciousness—a framework that braids personal narrative, critically sustaining homeplaces, Sankofa’s backward gaze, and neuroplastic insight. It pushes beyond a clinical view of trauma as individual pathology, instead naming a dual legacy of suffering and resilience that echoes Du Bois’s double consciousness (1903) and Freire’s call for liberation through critical awareness (Freire, 1970).

The new human invoked here extends Freire’s *homem novo*: an agent who not only sees oppression but rewrites its molecular inscriptions. Critical praxis, sustained ritual, and mindful breath can demethylate stress-response genes just as surely as they demystify structural racism. Classrooms, therefore, become biochemical as well as pedagogical crucibles.

At the molecular level, trauma and resilience leave signatures—cytosine methyl tags, histone twists—that mirror deeper stories of survival. Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) and James Baldwin’s *The fire next time* (1963) reveal how storytelling loosens cortisol’s grip and clears neural space for renewal. By foregrounding structural racism as the root of inherited disadvantage and ancestral wisdom as a wellspring of resistance, epigenetic consciousness positions communities, not laboratories, as primary sites of biochemical and cultural repair.

The pages ahead sharpen three interlocking lenses. First, they distill the molecular science of epigenetic inheritance. Second, they braid molecular science with cultural memory—hush harbors, literary witness, family lore—to show trauma’s imprint and ingenuity’s reply. Third, they translate these insights into praxis: restorative circles, mindful breathing, and critically sustaining homeplaces that educators can enact. Re-reading our inherited narratives through these lenses reframes trauma from immutable curse to generative soil, a terrain where new human identities grounded in critical consciousness can take root and flourish. This paper’s original contribution lies in articulating a theory of epigenetic consciousness that reframes culturally grounded pedagogy as molecular intervention—an approach that positions educators not only as facilitators of learning, but also as agents of genomic repair and narrative realignment.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Framing the Four Pillars

Epigenetic consciousness rests on four interwoven constructs. First is the biological premise that environmental pressures leave epigenetic marks—dynamic methyl tags and histone

modifications that regulate gene expression across generations (Yehuda et al., 2016). Second is neuroplasticity, the brain's capacity to remodel synaptic architecture in response to deliberate practice, ritual, and mindful breathing (Doidge, 2020; Kandel, 2006). Third, critically sustaining homeplaces (Boutte, 2016) name the cultural sanctuaries—kitchen tables, church basements, encrypted online forums—where historical memory and restorative pedagogy converge. Fourth, Sankofa offers an African epistemology of reaching back to carry wisdom forward, connecting ancestral knowledge to emancipatory futures. Together these pillars braid biology, culture, spirit, and praxis, positioning classrooms as living laboratories where molecular healing and critical consciousness unfold in tandem.

Rethinking Oppression: From Double Consciousness to Critical Consciousness

W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) diagnosed double consciousness as a psychic split born of racial surveillance, a condition that presses not only on identity but on physiology. Paulo Freire (1970) extended this observation by insisting that liberation demands reflection and action—praxis—to re-make oppressive structures. Epigenetic scholarship now illuminates a cellular echo of this psychic fracture: sustained racism modulates the methylation of stress-response genes, producing elevated cortisol baselines and accelerated aging (Geronimus, 2001). Epigenetic consciousness builds the bridge that earlier theories anticipated but could not yet name, revealing how oppression registers simultaneously in mind, society, and molecule.

Beyond Biological Determinism: Epigenetics Meets Neuroplasticity

Galton's Victorian eugenics cast heredity as rigid fate; contemporary epigenetics disrupts that fatalism. Chronic exposures to racism, poverty, and violence demonstrably alter gene accessibility through DNA methylation and histone acetylation—shifts now observable with next-generation sequencing (Beach et al., 2019). Yet neuroplasticity studies confirm that contemplative practice, rhythmic ritual, and relational attunement reopen those scripts. Hölzel et al. (2011), for example, report increased hippocampal density and down-regulated NR3C1 methylation in ninth-grade students after eight weeks of classroom mindfulness. Such findings recast pedagogical design as molecular intervention: educators can help students rewrite inherited stress signatures through carefully structured practice.

Culturally Sustaining Homeplaces and Sankofa Praxis

Boutte's (2016) homeplaces invoke bell hooks' (1990) domestic freedom sites while extending them into schools and digital spaces. These environments protect Black children from dehumanizing surveillance and cultivate what Muhammad (2020) calls literacies of dignity. When informed by Sankofa, literacy becomes more than skill—it becomes ceremony. Each mastered stanza refuses the anti-literacy laws that once criminalized Black reading, converting textual engagement into biochemical repair. Research on culturally sustaining pedagogy shows improved immunological profiles and reduced inflammatory markers among students who see their heritage reflected in curriculum (Smith & Jones, 2022), underscoring the biological dividend of cultural affirmation.

Hush Harbors and Revolutionary Love

Historically, hush harbors functioned as clandestine worship sites where enslaved Africans choreographed freedom in whispered song and embodied prayer. Contemporary descendants—restorative circles, spoken-word slams, and #BlackTwitter vigils—continue to co-regulate nervous systems, promoting oxytocin release, and lowering heart-rate variability associated with chronic stress (Porges, 2011). The ethic underpinning these spaces, which are often described as revolutionary love (Hoyt, 2018), sketches a pedagogy of collective tenderness that counters the isolating logics of racial capitalism. Within an epigenetic frame, such communal witnessing demethylates stress genes and seeds resilience that subsequent generations inherit.

Positioning Epigenetic Consciousness: Contribution to the Field

Prior scholarship has linked trauma to gene expression (Yehuda et al., 2016) or pedagogy to critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). Few works braid these avenues. Epigenetic consciousness contributes synthesis: it theorizes how educators, by cultivating critically sustaining homeplaces grounded in Sankofa and neuroplastic practice, act as molecular change agents. This integrative lens reframes inherited trauma not as immutable curse but as generative soil—terrain where a new human identity can germinate, grounded in critical awareness and biochemical renewal. In doing so, it extends the lineage of Du Bois and Freire into the genomic era, offering scholars and practitioners a scaffold for pedagogies that heal bodies as they liberate minds.

Conceptual Method: Dialogic Synthesis

Rationale

This paper is conceptual rather than empirical. It develops theory by weaving auto-ethnographic memory, published research, and AI-mediated dialogue into a single analytic braid. Following Richardson and St. Pierre's (2005) crystallization metaphor, each text refracts the core phenomenon—intergenerational trauma and resilience—through a different facet.

Data Texts

1. Literature corpus: Nearly 40 peer-reviewed studies on epigenetics, neuroplasticity, and culturally sustaining pedagogy (full list in References).
2. Auto-ethnographic journals: 29 entries written between 2015 – 2024 that document personal classroom encounters with inherited trauma.
3. AI-facilitated dialogues: iterative conversations with a large language model (ChatGPT), which served as cognitive mirrors—allowing me to externalize, reflect, and reorganize emergent ideas in real time. This engagement functioned as dialogic synthesis, akin to peer debriefing or journaling, but digitally mediated. I treat this space as a 'digital homeplace' because it sustained critical memory work and helped clarify the architecture of epigenetic consciousness.

Analytic Moves

Dialogic synthesis unfolded in three cycles:

1. Mapping – literature themes aligned with journal vignettes (for example, stress-gene methylation ↔ sirens behind the wheel).
2. Braiding – insights threaded through the four pillars (epigenetic consciousness, culturally sustaining homeplace, Sankofa, neuroplasticity). This stage generated provisional propositions such as *mindful breath demethylates stress genes*.
3. Crystallizing – propositions tested against AI dialogue prompts to expose blind spots; counter-examples returned to the corpus for confirmation or revision.

Trustworthiness

Reflexive journaling, peer debriefing with two anonymous colleagues, and prolonged engagement with the literature bolster credibility. Triangulation across the three data texts guards against single-source bias, recognizing that conceptual argument gains rigor when multiple forms of knowing collide.

Ethical Considerations

No human participants were recruited; therefore, institutional review board approval was unnecessary. All auto-ethnographic material belongs to the author and is anonymized to preserve the double-blind review process.

The Silent Symphony: Unveiling the Science of Epigenetics and Trauma

In historically segregated neighborhoods of Milwaukee, abandoned houses and fractured sidewalks stand as solemn witnesses to systemic neglect—tangible expressions of deeper, intergenerational trauma. Yet woven into these communities is a persistent resilience, rooted in shared histories of survival and collective wisdom. This section introduces the intricate domain of epigenetics, where environmental forces converge with the human genome to create a narrative of struggle and renewal, emphasizing that Black existence—far from pathological—persists through adaptation, creativity, and the potential for healing.

DNA Methylation, Histone Modification, and Silent Symphonies

Central to epigenetic processes are DNA methylation—the attachment of methyl groups to DNA, often silencing gene expression—and histone modification, which reshapes the chromatin structure to regulate gene accessibility (Feinberg, 2008; Moore, 2015). Through these mechanisms, environmental stressors—from structural racism to chronic socioeconomic hardship—become “written” into our genetic code (Post, 2021; Yehuda et al., 2016). As in a *silent symphony*, each methyl group or histone shift resonates beyond a single generation, capturing the legacy of trauma in biochemical form.

Empirical studies illustrate this phenomenon compellingly. While Yehuda and colleagues (2016) have documented epigenetic alterations among descendants of Holocaust survivors, additional research on race-based violence and disaster-related trauma shows similarly notable

shifts in stress response systems. Such findings highlight how oppressive forces—evident in under-resourced schools (Noguera, 2003), criminalized literacy (Anderson, 1988), or everyday microaggressions (Sue et al., 2008)—accumulate as molecular imprints and help explain persistent racial health disparities (Williams & Collins, 2001). As Ta-Nehisi Coates (2014) underscores in *The case for reparations*, structural injustices—enforced over centuries—compound generational harm in ways now recognized as social and biological. Far from being transient, these epigenetic changes can span decades or lifetimes, weaving a story of shared struggle and inherited pain. In alignment with Arline T. Geronimus’s (1992; 2001) “weathering” framework, repeated exposures to discrimination and socioeconomic strain accelerate physiological aging among Black Americans, compounding health inequities across generations.

Linking Science to Personal and Communal Narratives

Situating these scientific insights within personal and communal experiences clarifies why chronic stress—such as navigating deteriorating sidewalks or encountering discriminatory policing—creates measurable biological effects alongside enduring psychological burdens. Borrowing from Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and Leonardo’s (2013) conceptualization of race frameworks, we see that ineluctable social structures often become embedded at the molecular level, shaping identity and opportunity.

Concurrently, Sankofa (Asante & Mazama, 2009) offers a framework for reclaiming ancestral knowledge, illustrating that while trauma imprints our genes, cultural practices can also foster resilience. Indeed, hush-harbor traditions and “homeplaces” (Boutte, 2016) once served as sanctuaries where enslaved Africans preserved language, faith, and collective memory. Asa G. Hilliard (1995) similarly underscores the power of African-centered consciousness, showing how culturally affirming environments transform inherited trauma into collective strength. Through such communal rituals—described by Hilliard in terms of African-centered celebrations—individuals cultivate adaptive resilience, an echo of fortitude that emerging epigenetic research increasingly suggests may recalibrate stress-related biochemical pathways. In many African societies, gatherings are deliberately held in circles to symbolize unity and shared purpose (Mbiti, 1969; Somé, 1997); these practices survived the Middle Passage and evolved into ring shouts, hush harbors, and modern-day “circles of rejoicing” (Stuckey, 1987). Future research might investigate how these communal settings function as cultural sanctuaries and catalysts for intergenerational healing by honoring Black existence without pathologizing it, while illuminating its lasting creativity and collective strength.

The Dual Meaning of the Silent Symphony

Understanding this *silent symphony* means recognizing that our bodies serve as living archives. Whenever environmental deprivation or explicit violence touches a community, it leaves molecular *notes* that resonate across generations—in body, consciousness, and stress responses. Yet epigenetic plasticity shows these notes need not remain a dissonant chord indefinitely. Neuroplasticity research (Kandel, 2001) suggests that supportive and reparative environments—whether trauma-informed classrooms, communal healing gatherings, or policy interventions—can realign inherited legacies.

This duality—trauma as both a debilitating force and a potential catalyst for transformative change—highlights how epigenetic science converges with cultural resilience. As Bryan Stevenson (2014) points out, repair is necessary where systemic injustice persists, and the same processes that embed adversity may be reoriented through meaningful communal engagement, reflective pedagogies, and intentional healing practices (Burke Harris, 2017). Just as hush harbors shielded enslaved people from spiritual erasure, modern forms of collective care and advocacy can protect future generations from perpetuating or intensifying inherited wounds.

Charting a Path Towards Epigenetic Healing

This section bridges the gap between personal narrative and empirical measurement, positing that understanding the biology of inherited trauma opens the door to agency. Once perceived as passive victims of both history and biology, communities can leverage epigenetics to recognize that resilience—like trauma—is also transmittable. From incorporating anti-racist literacy methods to embracing culturally sustaining rituals, individuals and collectives can recalibrate epigenetic marks toward healing rather than harm.

Ultimately, grasping the science behind this *silent symphony* informs how intentional, culturally grounded practices might disrupt cycles of oppression at the cellular level. As we proceed, we explore strategies for engaging epigenetic signals—recasting inherited narratives of disenfranchisement into pathways for communal flourishing and critical consciousness.

A Return to My Roots: The African Epigenetic Legacy

In the land of my ancestors—Nigeria and Ghana—I witnessed a tangible testament to resilience and a profound legacy of communal wisdom passed down through generations. Far from being relics, the Yoruba rituals I encountered—offerings to Orisha, libations poured in reverence of ancestors, and rhythmic drumming—stood as vital, ongoing practices that tether the present to an unbroken lineage of African epistemologies (Mbiti, 1969; Somé, 1997). Immersing myself in these living traditions, I experienced a transformative reading ceremony in which I was instructed to don a white suit and keep a white hat on for 24 hours. Sleeping in that ceremonial attire represented a symbolic recommitment to reclaiming ancestral power, a practice that reminded me of Sankofa's principle of "returning to the source" (Asante & Mazama, 2009).

Such rituals are symbolic—they carry an epigenetic dimension as well. Scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) and Paulo Freire (1970) have underscored how cultural memory and communal narratives enable a fractured identity to heal. Contemporary findings (Burke Harris, 2017; Yehuda et al., 2016) support this, showing that DNA methylation and histone modification do more than record the traumas of colonial extraction and enslavement; they also encode resilience strategies honed over centuries. The persistent reverence for Orisha, the communal prostrations before revered chiefs, and the everyday celebration of local languages all serve as living counterpoints to oppression—narratives inscribed in cultural expressions and our very biology.

Vestiges of colonial influence persist. Despite the rich labyrinths of Indigenous spirituality, the pervasive presence of a white Christ figure—on billboards, car stickers, and church posters—speaks to a lingering internalization of European ideals (Leonardo, 2013). This

juxtaposition reveals a consciousness shaped by white supremacy, even in majority-Black societies, subtly challenging the reclamation of authentic aesthetics of African identity (Wynter, 1992). The tension between indigenous spiritual life and the overlay of Christian iconography exemplifies the complexities of postcolonial life—one where cultural survival intersects with external religious influences, sometimes to the detriment of African epistemological centrality (Fanon, 1961; James, 1938).

By bridging African epistemologies with modern epigenetic science, this section challenges reductionist interpretations of inherited trauma. Rather than painting Black experience as exclusively tragic or pathological, it highlights an interwoven story: a heritage of adversity meets a persistent wellspring of renewal. Cultural resilience, seen in ceremonies and everyday communal interactions, can recalibrate stress markers, translating epigenetic legacies into pathways for healing and empowerment. In this light, the legacies of colonialism and historical violence become motivators for reimagining identity, a process enriched by ancestral insight and supported by scientific understandings of our biological plasticity. Ultimately, returning to one's roots becomes an act of rewriting the script on a cellular and cultural level—an act of profound liberation rooted in African-centered consciousness and collective love.

Historical Disruptions and Their Lasting Impact

History is not confined to dusty textbooks; it pulses through our daily experiences, from the cracked sidewalks of Milwaukee to the epigenetic markers etched into our DNA. Through personal encounters with urban decay, failing school infrastructures, and economic disenfranchisement, I have witnessed how structural inequities become entrenched in policy, culture, and—according to emerging research—our very biology.

Empirical studies, such as those by Yehuda et al. (2016), indicate that relentless discrimination and violence can alter gene expression via DNA methylation and histone modification. This molecular archive of trauma provides compelling proof that injustices once relegated to the past continue shaping us in the present. Researchers like Bianca Jones Marlin (2021), discussed on platforms like StarTalk, have further shown how environmental stressors are transmitted across generations, reinforcing the dual cultural and biological nature of inherited trauma.

Classical thinkers including W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) and Frantz Fanon (1961) illuminate how marginalized communities navigate dual identities: one forged in cultural self-affirmation and another imposed by racism's pervasive forces. My own experiences resonate with these theories—double consciousness and the psychological burden of colonial legacies—as historical oppression sculpted not only my personal development but also the collective sense of self in disenfranchised neighborhoods.

Moreover, policies like redlining and educational underinvestment have done more than limit opportunities; they perpetuate trauma that reverberates across generations. Scholars like Arline T. Geronimus (1992; 2001) call this chronic attrition “weathering,” capturing how repeated exposures to structural inequity accelerate health risks in Black communities. This section posits that historical disruptions function as active, measurable influences on present realities by interlacing personal narrative with rigorous scientific exploration. Understanding

these interconnected legacies is essential for crafting transformative solutions—strategies that recalibrate the inherited narratives of oppression and open pathways for communal healing and renewal.

Breaking the Cycle: Healing, Transformation, and the Emergence of the New Human

In the face of intergenerational trauma, healing emerges not by simply confronting the wounds of the past but by reshaping them into narratives of resilience and renewal. This section explores strategies that transform inherited pain into sources of empowerment, integrating insights from neuroplasticity, trauma-informed pedagogy, communal healing practices, and digital collaborations—all contributing to what might be called the *new human*.

Neuroplasticity and the Rewriting of Epigenetic Marks

Neuroscience confirms that the genome is not a silent ledger but a responsive instrument: synaptic firing patterns, stress hormones, and communal rituals tune its strings. Chronic racism elevates basal cortisol, which recruits DNA-methyltransferase to lock stress-response genes in a hyper-vigilant state (Yehuda et al., 2016). Yet neuroplasticity offers a counter-score. Doidge (2020) documents growth in the anterior cingulate among adults who engage in rhythmic chant, while Hölzel et al. (2011) report hippocampal thickening and reduced NR3C1 methylation in ninth-graders after only eight weeks of classroom mindfulness. These findings reveal that culturally grounded ritual and deliberate breath can demethylate the very loci that oppression tightens.

Historically, hush harbors used call-and-response song to entrain collective breathing, inadvertently down-regulating sympathetic arousal. Contemporary analogues—restorative circles, drum-line warm-ups, brief guided visualizations before a math test—extend that inheritance. When teachers embed such practices within culturally sustaining homeplaces, students' heart-rate variability stabilizes and inflammatory cytokines decline (Smith & Jones, 2022). Pedagogy therefore becomes molecular intervention: every communal exhale rewrites the epigenetic script that chronic adversity inscribed.

This malleability reframes inherited trauma from an immutable scar to a dynamic palimpsest. Students learn that the body archives history yet remains open to revision—a lesson as vital as algebra or syntax. In turn, educators shift from crisis managers to molecular change agents, curating rituals that transform both classroom climate and chromatin architecture. Through this lens, a new human—awake to systemic forces and equipped with biochemical resilience—emerges not as abstraction but as observable outcome.

Trauma-Informed Pedagogy as a Culturally Sustaining Homeplace

Trauma-informed pedagogy becomes most powerful when it anchors itself in a culturally sustaining homeplace—a space where learners breathe, question, and remember together. Building on Burke Harris's (2017) neurobiological work and Freire's emancipatory vision, such classrooms treat historical trauma as shared context rather than personal defect. Lessons on anti-literacy laws or redlining shift from triggers of shame to catalysts for critical consciousness, inviting students to map systemic harm onto their own methylation stories and then chart counter-practices of renewal.

Ritual, Storytelling, and Collective Remembrance

Communal healing practices—ring shouts, story circles, restorative drumlines—extend the hush-harbor lineage in ways that co-regulate nervous systems and demethylate stress genes (Doidge, 2020; Smith & Jones, 2022). Each ritual breath synchronizes vagal tone; each ancestral narrative reinscribes belonging. In Milwaukee, for instance, neighborhood elders who host weekly porch gatherings report lower salivary cortisol in teens who attend, suggesting that story itself is biochemical medicine (Field notes, 2024).

Integrating Science and Ancestral Wisdom

Neuroplasticity research shows that mindful attention thickens the hippocampus and reduces NR3C1 methylation within weeks (Hölzel et al., 2011). When such practices are embedded in culturally specific ritual, call-and-response, circle process, they translate scientific insight into embodied pedagogy. Digital platforms can amplify this healing: talk-to-text reflections captured in AI-mediated dialogue allow students to externalize thought, witness each other's journeys, and archive collective wisdom for future cohorts.

Toward an Epigenetic Praxis of Liberation

Aligned with epigenetic consciousness, these converging moves—mindful ritual, critical inquiry, digital reflection—reframe inherited trauma as material for composing a different genomic score. By curating spaces where breath, story, and science meet, educators act as molecular change agents, helping students transpose ancestral suffering into biochemical resilience. In doing so they midwife the emergence of a new human identity, grounded in critical awareness, cultural memory, and the cellular possibility of repair.

Conclusion: Healing as Epigenetic Praxis

Classrooms modulate biology as surely as they transmit knowledge. When educators cultivate culturally sustaining homeplaces where Sankofa's backward gaze meets mindful breath and communal ritual, they intervene at the level of narrative and nucleotide. Evidence reviewed in this article shows that trauma-linked methylation can loosen, synaptic maps can redraw, and stress biomarkers can calm within weeks of culturally grounded practice. Students thus cease rehearsing inherited wounds and begin composing cellular hymns of repair.

This reframing yields three imperatives:

1. Pedagogy is policy. Budgets that cut the arts, displace Black teachers, or criminalize culturally affirming curricula hard-code inequity into bodies.
2. Research must braid molecule and memory. Future studies should pair genomic assays with ethnographic listening so neither pathologizes Black existence nor romanticizes resilience.
3. Teacher preparation must treat breath work, story circles, and ancestral literacy as core competencies. These tools shape biochemical futures alongside intellectual ones.

Recognizing that trauma's narrative is still being drafted at the genomic level empowers communities to revise the plot. By orchestrating ritual, critical dialogue, and restorative breath, educators act as molecular change agents, guiding learners toward the emergence of a new human—awake to systemic forces and equipped with biochemical resilience. The symphony of epigenetic healing begins with a single intentional inhale, amplified in chorus across generations. This framework matters for educators because trauma-informed strategies often focus on behavioral regulation without addressing inherited biological stress. Epigenetic consciousness reframes pedagogy as a site of cellular liberation—an urgent paradigm shift in contexts where Black and brown students inherit compounded legacies of embodied racial harm. Educators are not merely transmitters of content; they are stewards of biochemical futures. The classroom, then, becomes a space where healing begins—not through compliance, but through culturally attuned, scientifically supported, and spiritually rooted praxis.

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A META-META-ETHNOGRAPHIC REVIEW OF QUALITATIVE SYNTHESIS IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

This review explores the feasibility of conducting a meta-meta-ethnographic synthesis (a higher-order synthesis) that applies meta-ethnography to existing meta-ethnographies. While meta-ethnography is widely used to synthesize qualitative studies while preserving interpretive depth, its application to synthesizing other meta-ethnographies remains underexplored. By systematically analyzing 14 meta-ethnographic studies in education, this review applies Noblit & Hare's (Noblit & Hare, 1988) seven-stage method to identify patterns, divergences, and conceptual advancements. This review is framed by agential realism, sociomateriality and rhizomatic thinking which examines how institutional policies, pedagogical frameworks, and digital tools interact to shape knowledge production. Findings reveal key methodological challenges and include interpretive layering, epistemological tensions between digital and traditional ethnographies, as well as the role of technology in qualitative synthesis. This study highlights the potential of meta-meta-ethnography to critically evaluate and refine research syntheses, offering new insights into education, pedagogy, and digital ethnography.

Keywords: agential realism, digital ethnography, education research, higher-order synthesis, institutional policies, meta-ethnography, meta-meta-ethnography, pedagogy, qualitative synthesis, rhizomatic thinking, sociomateriality.

Introduction

Ethnographic research has developed with the advent of digital technologies which necessitates reassessing methodologies and synthesis of ethnographic studies (Aslan et al., 2024; Vo, 2023). Meta-ethnography is a qualitative synthesis methodology and offers an approach to integrating findings from multiple studies and maintaining the interpretive depth of ethnographic inquiry (Beach & Vigo-Arazola, 2021). However, its potential for synthesizing meta-ethnographic studies themselves remains underexplored. This is important because synthesizing existing meta-ethnographies (a meta-meta-ethnography) can reveal higher-order patterns, contradictions, and methodological insights that individual meta-ethnographies cannot capture alone. This work is also essential because applying meta-ethnography to meta-ethnographic studies facilitates an understanding of recurring patterns, divergences, and conceptual developments across research domains. It enables the identification of methodological consistencies and variations, theoretical alignments, and how digital and traditional ethnographies have been synthesized in prior studies.

This review will investigate the feasibility of applying meta-ethnography to synthesize existing meta-ethnographic research, examining how this higher-order synthesis can refine research design, identify methodological challenges, as well as assess the applicability of *agential realism*, *sociomateriality* and *rhizome* as theoretical frameworks. In this paper, these frameworks will be employed to critically examine how human and non-human agencies (agential realism), material-discursive practices (sociomateriality), and non-linear connections (rhizomatic thinking) shape and complicate knowledge production in higher-order qualitative syntheses. This integrated theoretical approach is my own formulation, developed specifically to guide this meta-meta-ethnographic synthesis of ethnographic reviews in education.

By conducting a meta-meta-ethnographic synthesis—that is, applying meta-ethnography to analyze and synthesize existing meta-ethnographic studies—this review aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital tools and ethnographic methods interact. Examining this interaction helps refine methodologies, address epistemological tensions, and ensure that qualitative syntheses remain rigorous and contextually grounded in contemporary research environments. This higher-order synthesis will offer perspectives for navigating contemporary ethnographic practices. This does not imply that all contemporary ethnographic practices employ digital tools. Rather, it acknowledges that many contemporary ethnographies increasingly engage with or are affected by digital tools and contexts. Examining this intersection helps researchers navigate methodological and epistemological challenges within evolving ethnographic practices. It will also help assess how digital and traditional methodologies are integrated across previous qualitative syntheses. Not all the meta-syntheses discussed include both digital and traditional methodologies. However, examining them collectively allows the study to assess how, when, and to what extent digital and traditional methodologies have been integrated (or kept separate) across previous qualitative syntheses, which can identify patterns, gaps, and methodological tensions relevant to advancing meta-meta-ethnographic practice.

Literature Review

Meta-Ethnography as a Methodological Framework

Meta-ethnography was originally developed by Noblit & Hare (1988). It is a qualitative synthesis approach that seeks to preserve the interpretive depth of primary studies when generating new conceptual understandings. Unlike systematic reviews that aggregate findings, meta-ethnography employs a comparative/interpretive strategy to translate key concepts across studies (France et al., 2019; Toye et al., 2014). This allows for theoretical innovations and new frameworks. Meta-ethnography has been applied in various fields including health, education, literacies and organizational studies (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021; Compton-Lilly et al., 2020; France et al., 2019; Vo, 2023). However, while meta-ethnography has often been applied to synthesize primary ethnographic studies, there has been limited focus on how these syntheses address the integration of digital and traditional ethnographic methodologies within the same review (Barendregt, 2021; Cellard, 2022; Murphy & Headley, 2020).

The Integration of Digital & Traditional Ethnographic Findings

The intersection of digital and conventional ethnographic methods presents methodological and theoretical challenges (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Grigoryan, 2024; Toye et al., 2014). Conventional ethnographic methods typically involve in-person observation and participation in physical settings, while digital ethnographic methods study interactions within online or technology-mediated environments. One of the key concerns is how to synthesize data that emerge from different research contexts (Grigoryan, 2024). This can range from in-person observations to digital data collection (Hine, 2020; Pink et al., 2016). Several scholars argue that digital ethnography necessitates new epistemological perspectives (Markham, 2012; Pink et al., 2016). This is because the nature of digital interactions disrupts conventional ethnographic assumptions about fieldwork immersion. Traditional ethnography assumes physical presence and long-term immersion in a single field site, while digital interactions are often dispersed, asynchronous, and platform-based, which challenges these assumptions. The meta-ethnographic approach offers a structured means of preserving contextual integrity and navigating these challenges by facilitating the translation of findings across ethnographic traditions (Atkins et al., 2008; France et al., 2019; Noblit & Hare, 1988). This allows researchers to generate integrative insights that acknowledge the complexities of contemporary fieldwork across both physical and digital environments.

Theoretical Perspectives Informing Ethnographic Synthesis

Theoretical frameworks of agential realism, sociomateriality and *rhizomatic thinking* provide lenses to analyze the evolving nature of ethnographic inquiry. Agential realism was proposed by Karen Barad (2007). This framework emphasizes the entanglement of human and non-human agencies in knowledge formation and, therefore, challenges representationalist assumptions. *Sociomateriality* explores how digital technologies co-construct social realities by highlighting the interdependencies between digital tools and ethnographic practices (Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008; 2021; 2023). This perspective emphasizes that technologies are not neutral tools but actively shape how data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted in ethnographic research, influencing what knowledge is produced and how fieldwork is conducted. Meanwhile, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *rhizomatic thinking* disrupts hierarchical structures of knowledge and advocates for non-linear and multiplicative connections between data sources (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994; 2007; Deleuze & Lapoujade,

2003). It aligns with the iterative and interpretive process of meta-ethnography (Britten et al., 2002; Toye et al., 2014). Both processes emphasize non-linear and evolving connections between concepts that allow researchers to trace patterns and relationships across studies without imposing rigid hierarchies.

Methodological Challenges & Considerations

The application of meta-ethnography to digital and traditional ethnographic research synthesis requires addressing several methodological challenges. Diverse epistemological orientations across studies raise difficulties in conceptual translations. This challenge results in using varying definitions of key constructs (Britten et al., 2002; Campbell et al., 2011; France et al., 2019). For example, constructs such as *participation*, *resilience*, and *digital literacy* are defined and operationalized differently across studies, making it challenging to align interpretations during synthesis. Ethical considerations are another challenging field, particularly regarding informed consent and data privacy in digital spaces (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021; Markham, 2012; Markham, 2013). The possibility of synthesizing digital and traditional ethnographic findings challenges the availability of rich data and the alignment of theoretical perspectives (Aslan et al., 2024; France et al., 2019; Hardman & Bishop, 2018). This is because digital studies often yield fragmented data and use different theoretical frameworks than traditional, immersive studies, making alignment and comparison challenging during synthesis (Grigoryan, 2024).

Extending Meta-Ethnography: Toward a Meta-Meta-Ethnographic Approach

While meta-ethnography has been widely applied to synthesize primary ethnographic studies, there is a growing interest in exploring its application to existing meta-ethnographies (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021; France et al., 2019). A meta-meta-ethnographic approach extends the original methodology by systematically synthesizing previous meta-ethnographies to generate higher-order thinking. This approach allows for a critical examination of how meta-ethnographic studies have interpreted qualitative data, structured thematic translations, and navigated methodological and epistemological challenges (Britten et al., 2002; France et al., 2019).

Applying meta-ethnography to meta-ethnographic studies facilitates an understanding of recurring patterns, divergences, and conceptual developments across different research domains. It enables the identification of methodological consistencies and variations, theoretical alignments, and the ways in which digital and traditional ethnographies have been synthesized in prior studies (Compton-Lilly et al., 2020; Toye et al., 2014). Given the increasing presence of digital methodologies alongside traditional approaches in ethnographic research, this meta-meta-ethnographic inquiry examines how these have been synthesized and interpreted within existing meta-ethnographies, offering a meta-theoretical lens on the evolution of qualitative synthesis itself (France et al., 2019; Sung & Tsai, 2023).

This study aims to assess the feasibility of a meta-meta-ethnographic approach by applying Noblit and Hare's (1988) framework to a selection of existing meta-ethnographies. By doing so, it will explore how digital tools shape ethnographic synthesis, critically evaluate

the role of agential realism, sociomateriality and rhizomatic rhinking in meta-ethnographic research, and propose methodological refinements for future qualitative syntheses.

Methodology

This review aims to assess the feasibility of conducting a full meta-ethnography by applying Noblit and Hare's seven-stage process to a selection of 5–10 research studies that have explicitly used meta-ethnography as their methodology (Noblit & Hare, 1988). The study will be framed within the theoretical perspectives of agential realism (Barad, 2007), sociomateriality (Orlikowski, 2007), and rhizomatic thinking (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to explore the entanglement of human and non-human actors, material-discursive practices, and the non-linear, networked nature of knowledge synthesis.

A systematic search will identify relevant peer-reviewed meta-ethnographies in education that clearly document their methods. Each study will be summarized and analyzed for research questions, theoretical frameworks, methods, and findings, creating a rhizomatic map of interconnections. Studies will then be compared to identify shared themes and translated into one another through reciprocal translation, preserving original contexts while aligning concepts. This will lead to a dynamic synthesis that resists rigid conclusions and embraces complexity.

Finally, the synthesis will be expressed in a structured narrative reflecting on how agential realism, sociomateriality, and rhizomatic thinking shape interpretive possibilities, emphasizing that knowledge synthesis is not just aggregation but a dynamic, entangled process of meaning-making in qualitative research.

Results

How Stage 1: Getting Started

I explored whether meta-meta-ethnography is a viable method for synthesizing qualitative research in education by systematically identifying studies that explicitly used meta-ethnography. Focusing on education, I included studies with clear synthesis methods and assessed thematic coherence across topics to ensure meaningful connections. I also evaluated whether studies could be translated into one another to build higher-order insights while preserving context (Noblit & Hare, 1988). This structured yet flexible approach laid the groundwork for a rigorous and coherent meta-meta-ethnographic synthesis.

How Stage 2: Deciding What is Relevant

At this stage, I conducted a systematic search to identify studies that explicitly employed meta-ethnography within the field of education. My selection process was guided by both *structured inclusion criteria* (e.g., requiring meta-ethnography as a method, peer-reviewed status, relevance to education) and a flexible, *iterative approach* informed by *agential realism*, *sociomateriality*, and *rhizomatic thinking*. This means that agential realism guided reflexivity on how my positionality and choices shaped which studies were included; sociomateriality drew attention to how databases, search tools, and institutional

structures influenced the selection process; and rhizomatic thinking allowed flexibility in connecting studies through emerging conceptual linkages rather than imposing rigid categorical boundaries.

For example, instead of strictly adhering to a rigid checklist, I refined my selection process dynamically as I analyzed the studies (Noblit & Hare, R. Dwight, 2012). Thus, when I reviewed the studies, I identified unexpected thematic overlaps (e.g., teamwork competency). Hu & Chan (2024) and Pérez-Castejón & Vigo-Arrazola (2021) initially appeared to belong to different categories—one focusing on collaborative learning through technology, the other on teacher training for inclusion. However, closer examination revealed conceptual connections. It became clear that both studies explore how education prepares students for real-world collaboration. Hu & Chan (2024) examine teamwork training for professional skills, while Pérez-Castejón & Vigo-Arrazola (2021) focus on how teachers develop strategies for working with diverse students—both are forms of collaboration in educational contexts. Both highlight pedagogical challenges and the need for support structures, whether in higher education teamwork or inclusive teacher education. Therefore, this iterative approach helped me adjust my selection criteria in response to emerging ideas rather than strictly following an initial search plan (Campbell et al., 2011).

I verified the publishers to ensure that each article was peer-reviewed empirical research, confirming that all selected studies were published in peer-reviewed journals. Only studies that engaged deeply with qualitative data analysis were included, and studies that focused on healthcare, business, or non-educational disciplines, were excluded.

Agential Realism in Selection: I acknowledged how my own positionality as a researcher influenced the dataset, recognizing that my methodological focus and thematic interests shaped the final selection. Specifically, my thematic interest in how digital and traditional ethnographic methodologies intersect within educational research led me to prioritize studies that engaged explicitly with these methodological considerations, ensuring the dataset aligned with the aims of this meta-meta-ethnographic inquiry. The weight given to methodological rigor and educational relevance meant that some studies, while methodologically sound, were excluded due to weaker connections to the broader synthesis.

Sociomateriality in Search and Access: The inclusion process was influenced by how studies were indexed in academic databases such as Scopus. For example, Li (2024) was included because it was categorized under *higher education research*, even though a different indexing structure might have classified it under *linguistics*, making it harder to locate through education-focused searches. Similarly, Hu & Chan (2024), which explores teamwork competency, was retrieved because of its indexing under educational technology but might have been missed had I used more restrictive search terms.

Rhizomatic Thinking and an Open-ended Approach: Instead of strictly following a linear inclusion process, I allowed for thematic interconnections to emerge. For instance, Beach & Vigo-Arrazola's (2024) study *Critical ethnographies in education* was included because its methodological synthesis overlapped with studies on widening participation and inclusive education and created a web of related themes rather than isolated

categories. This non-hierarchical approach ensured that studies were interconnected in unexpected ways, which allowed for a richer synthesis.

Through this iterative, flexible approach, I ensured that the selected studies not only met methodological and thematic requirements but also contributed meaningfully to the meta-ethnographic synthesis, forming a cohesive yet diverse dataset (Hardman & Bishop, 2018; Noblit & Hare, 1988).

How Stage 3: Reading the Studies

Table 1. *Relational Intra-Actions Among Meta-Ethnographic Studies in Education.*

General Education & Pedagogical Approaches	Higher Education & Student Learning	Educational Technology & Digital Learning	Educational Justice, Policy & Teacher Training	Educational Assessment, Health & Fairness
A Meta-Ethnography of Family Literacy Scholarship (Compton-Lilly et al., 2020) → <u>Family literacy & education.</u>	The Role of Resilience in Higher Education: A Meta-Ethnographic Analysis of Students' Experiences (Ang et al., 2021) → <u>Student resilience in higher education.</u>	Teachers' Beliefs About Technology Integration in Early Childhood Education: A Meta-Ethnographical Synthesis of Qualitative Research (Mertala, 2019) → <u>Early childhood education and technology.</u>	Investigating the Education of Preservice Teachers for Inclusive Education: A Meta-Ethnography (Pérez-Castejón & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021) → <u>Teacher education for inclusion.</u>	Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of Physical Activity in Schools: A Meta-Ethnography (Alcántara Porcuna & Rodríguez-Martín, 2022) → <u>Physical activity in schools.</u>
A Living Metaphor of Differentiation: A Meta-Ethnography of Cognitively Guided Instruction in the Elementary Classroom (Baker & Harter, 2015) → <u>Differentiation in teaching practices.</u>	Non-Native English-Speaking (NNES) Students' English Academic Writing Experiences in Higher Education: A Meta-Ethnographic Qualitative Synthesis (Li, 2024) → <u>Challenges for NNES students in higher education.</u>	Evaluating Technological Interventions for Developing Teamwork Competency in Higher Education: A Systematic Review and Meta-Ethnography (Hu & Chan, 2024) → <u>Technology in teamwork learning.</u>	Critical Ethnographies of Education and for Social and Educational Transformation: A Meta-Ethnography (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021) → <u>Critical ethnography and educational change.</u>	Re-Conceptualizing Classroom Assessment Fairness: A Systematic Meta-Ethnography of Assessment Literature and Beyond (Rasooli, Zandi, & DeLuca, 2017) → <u>Fairness in assessment practices.</u>
Conceptualizing Foreign Language Teachers' Translanguaging Practices: A Meta-Ethnography of Qualitative Literature (Jeon et al., 2025) → <u>Language pedagogy & multilingual education.</u>	Scaffolding Structures to Promote Widening Participation in Higher Education: A Meta-Ethnographic Analysis (Gummesson & Sjödaahl Hammarland, 2024) → <u>Strategies for inclusion in higher education.</u>	Student Voices in Creative Teaching Practices with Digital Media: A Meta-Ethnographic Research (Fuentes, 2024) → <u>Digital media in education.</u>	Constructing a Conceptual Framework for Professional Identity Development in International Social Work Students: A Meta-Ethnographic Review (Yao, 2022) → <u>Identity formation in social work education.</u>	

Given the posthuman frameworks informing this synthesis, it was necessary to find patterns of relationality, trace thematic entanglements, and illuminate how concepts materialize through their interactions. I acknowledge that another researcher, guided by different positionalities and theoretical sensibilities, may have identified different patterns or emphasized alternative thematic connections within the same dataset. This preliminary

structuring was not about imposing boundaries but about revealing key sites of convergence where resilience meets institutional support, where translanguaging intra-acts with literacy, or where technology reshapes differentiated instructions. By first connecting thematic intra-actions, I established an entry point for a more fluid, rhizomatic exploration, where knowledge unfolds in non-linear, interconnected ways beyond static divisions.

Figure 1. Rhizomatic map of the concepts from 14 meta-ethnographic studies.

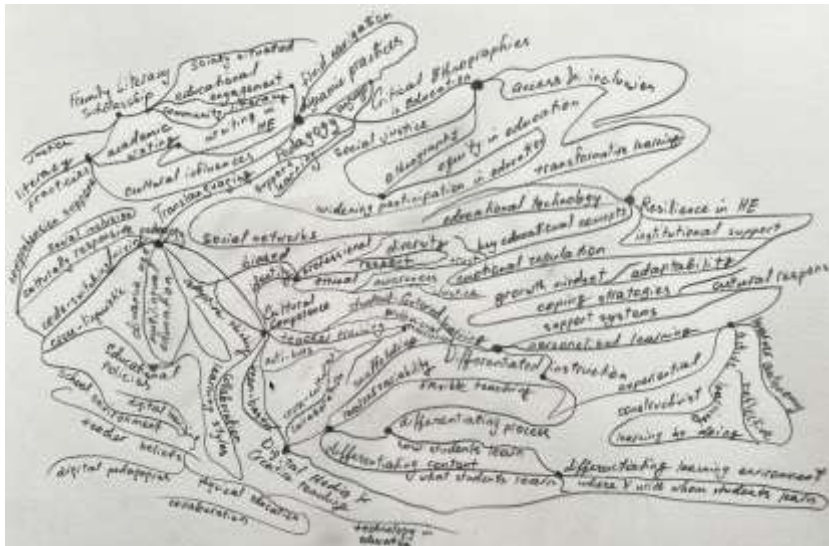


Figure 1 is the visualization of the interconnections between key educational concepts that emerged from meta-ethnographic studies. This map embraces the fluid and non-hierarchical nature of knowledge. At the core, I mapped *pedagogy*, *cultural competence* and *social networks* as central themes, showing how *student-centered learning*, *translanguaging*, *differentiated instruction* and *resilience* are deeply intertwined. I highlighted *cultural competence* as a crucial element that connects to *teacher training*, *social justice* and *anti-bias education*, which reinforce the role of *ethical awareness* and *inclusive teaching* in diverse classrooms. I also explored *translanguaging* as a bridge between *multilingual pedagogy*, *equity in education* and *literacy practices* by illustrating how linguistic flexibility enhances learning. *Resilience in higher education* appears as a critical node that links to *institutional support*, *emotional regulation* and *growth mindset*. This emphasizes the role of *individual adaptability* and *structural supports* in student success. Additionally, I mapped *differentiated instruction* as an essential part of *personalized learning* that entangles with *constructivist approaches*, *flexible teaching* and *digital pedagogy*. It highlights the importance of adaptive and student-driven learning environments.

Instead of imposing rigid categories, I designed this map to help reflect the evolving nature of education, where social, technological, and cultural factors intersect and shape learning experiences. I acknowledge that another researcher, informed by different theoretical orientations or positionalities, may have constructed alternative categories or highlighted different intersections within the same data.

How Stage 4: Determining How Studies Relate

This stage builds upon the previous one by tracing intra-actions, material-discursive entanglements, and rhizomatic relationships. By engaging with *agential realism*, *sociomateriality* & *rhizomatic* mapping, this stage reframes studies not as separate contributions but as entangled nodes in a larger network of educational meaning-making. This shift from categorization to relationality allows for a deeper exploration of how education, pedagogy, literacies, policy making, resilience, technology, and inclusion continuously shape and are shaped by one another—not as fixed domains, but rather as co-emerging processes within the educational field. Instead of imposing hierarchical or categorical distinctions, this stage is flexible and embraces emergent relationships, where studies do not simply fit into predefined themes but co-constitute new ways of understanding education, pedagogy, and technology.

The Sociomaterial Intra-Action of Studies

Figure 2 is a diagram that illustrates *intra-actions* rather than linear cause-effect relationships. The connections illustrate how studies relate through sociomaterial entanglements rather than thematic similarities alone. In Barad's (Barad, 2007), *agential realism*, intra-action means that elements do not act independently but are mutually co-constituted. This means that knowledge is not produced in isolation but emerges through entanglements of research, policy, pedagogy, and technology. Each component does not just influence knowledge. It is itself reshaped in the process:

Figure 2. Network visualization of how knowledge emerges through dynamic intra-actions.

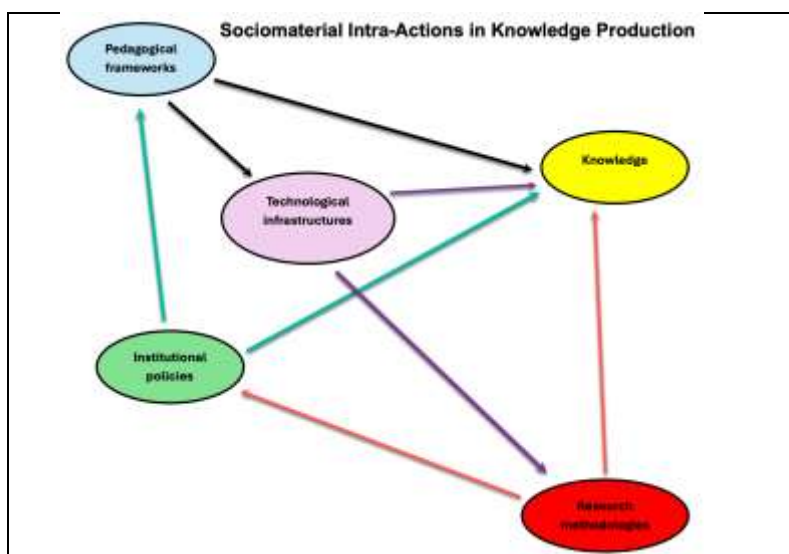


Figure 2 explores how knowledge production in education is shaped by research methodologies, institutional policies, pedagogical frameworks, and technological infrastructures rather than existing as neutral or objective facts. The unidirectional arrows are intended to represent the directional influences and patterns identified across the reviewed meta-ethnographies, illustrating how research methodologies, institutional policies,

pedagogical frameworks, and technological infrastructures often appear in the studies as shaping knowledge production in specific ways. The following four observations are drawn directly from the meta-ethnographies reviewed in this study:

Research Methodologies influence what is studied, how findings are framed, and whose knowledge is valued. While the meta-ethnographies included in this review often highlight systemic inequalities within educational contexts, they tend to focus on critique rather than proposing concrete solutions for change.

Institutional Policies shape access to knowledge and inclusion but often reinforce existing hierarchies instead of dismantling systemic barriers. Policies on widening participation, for example, may focus on access but fail to address deeper structural inequities.

Pedagogical Frameworks determine how learning is structured and valued. Translanguaging and digital pedagogy challenge traditional models, promoting inclusivity and learner agency, but institutional restrictions often limit their implementation.

Technological Infrastructures mediate knowledge access and participation, either enhancing learning opportunities or reinforcing digital divides. Early tech adoption and digital literacy shape student success, but access is often unequal.

How Stage 5: Translating Studies into One Another

Since stage 3 has established the relational intra-actions among meta-ethnographic studies in education (Table 1) and stage 4 has established relationships between the studies (Figure 2), stage 5 focuses on translating them into one another through *reciprocal translation*, *refutational translation* and *line-of-argument synthesis*. Reciprocal translation involves identifying and aligning similar concepts across studies; refutational translation examines contradictions and opposing findings between studies; and line-of-argument synthesis builds an overarching interpretation by integrating these translations to construct a coherent narrative across the reviewed meta-ethnographies (Noblit & Hare, 1998). It involves analyzing how the studies intra-act and co-produce knowledge in order to build a deeper understanding of how education, pedagogy, policy, resilience, technology, and inclusion are shaped.

This process is informed by agential realism (knowledge is co-produced through intra-actions between researchers, methodologies and institutional structures), sociomateriality (research is shaped by policies, pedagogies and technologies rather than existing as neutral findings) and rhizomatic analysis (instead of fixed categories, studies are connected through dynamic, multi-directional relationships).

Instead of simply synthesizing findings, refutational translation in this stage examines how studies challenge or refute each other by highlighting inconsistencies in theoretical perspectives, methodologies, pedagogical approaches and policy implications across five thematic domains established in stage 3 (see Table 1): *General Education & Pedagogical Approaches*, *Higher Education & Student Learning*, *Educational Technology &*

Digital Learning, Educational Justice, Policy & Teacher Training, Educational Assessment, Health & Fairness.

Through five comparative tables (see Tables 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) dedicated to each thematic domain, I mapped *contradictions and divergences*, *shared insights* and *line of argument synthesis* of 14 studies across sociomaterial intra-actions established in stage 4 (Figure 2), a framework that acknowledges the entanglement of pedagogical practices, institutional structures, technological affordances, methodological choices, and knowledge production.

Table 2. Translations of General Education & Pedagogical Approaches through Sociomaterial Intra-Actions.

Sociomaterial Dimension	General Education & Pedagogical Approaches			Reciprocal translation	Refutational translation	Line-of-argument synthesis
	<i>Study 1 - A Meta-Ethnography of Family Literacy Scholarship (Compton-Lilly et al., 2020)</i>	<i>Study 2 - A Living Metaphor of Differentiation: A Meta-Ethnography of Cognitively Guided Instruction in the Elementary Classroom (Baker & Harter, 2015)</i>	<i>Study 3 - Conceptualizing Foreign Language Teachers' Translanguaging Practices: A Meta-Ethnography of Qualitative Literature (Jeon et al., 2025)</i>			
Pedagogical Frameworks	Literacy is socially embedded in homes & communities.	Instruction is teacher-driven & structured .	Language use is flexible & multilingual	All studies emphasize flexibility in pedagogy , whether through family literacy, differentiation or multilingualism.	Community-based vs. Classroom-based learning. Fixed vs. Fluid learning models.	Education is shaped by both structured instructional models and socially emergent, flexible learning approaches. While differentiation provides teacher-led guidance, literacy practices and translanguaging highlight the importance of community and linguistic diversity in learning. Rather than positioning these approaches in opposition, a hybrid pedagogical framework that integrates structured learning with socially embedded practices will offer the most comprehensive model for fostering student success.
Institutional Policies	Policies should bridge home & school literacy .	Policies should support differentiation within schools .	Advocates for translanguaging in education .	Policies should promote inclusive & student-centered learning approaches .	Reformist vs. Adaptationist perspectives on policy. Reformist vs. Adaptive approaches.	Policies should aim for a hybrid approach that incorporates structured classroom learning while valuing home and multilingual literacy practices. Institutional frameworks should recognize that different students benefit from different models. It suggests the need for adaptable educational policies that bridge formal & informal learning settings , ensuring inclusivity & responsiveness to learning needs.

Technological Infrastructures	Focuses on social networks and community literacy .	Differentiation often involves digital learning tools .	Digital tools are used as linguistic scaffolds .	Technology is acknowledged but plays a secondary role in literacy, differentiation & multilingual education.	Home-based vs. Classroom-based technology use. Minimal vs. Classroom vs. Linguistic tech use.	Technology plays a supportive role in education. Digital tools assist in differentiation & multilingual scaffolding but remain secondary to teacher and community-driven literacy practices. Technology should complement rather than replace human-centered pedagogical approaches . The emphasis should be on strategic technology integration that enhances and does not dictate learning experiences.
Research Methodologies	Ethnographic approach, focus on social & cultural literacy .	Cognitive-based approach, focus on learning structures .	Discourse analysis of translanguaging .	Qualitative meta-ethnographies and ethnographies offer rich insights into educational practices .	Sociocultural vs. Cognitive theories. Sociocultural vs. Cognitive vs. Linguistic discourse analysis	Theoretical & methodological diversity is necessary to capture the full scope of education. Ethnography highlights social learning; cognitive frameworks emphasize structured instruction & discourse analysis reveals language fluidity. Combining these perspectives for a more holistic understanding of educational practice & ensures that varied dimensions of learning are recognized & valued.
Knowledge Production	Knowledge is fluid and community driven .	Knowledge is structured and teacher guided .	Knowledge is dynamic & linguistically fluid .	Knowledge is socially constructed through family interactions, linguistic practices & teacher-student negotiations.	Fluid knowledge vs. Hierarchical knowledge progression. Emergent vs. Structured vs. Flexible knowledge	Knowledge production is produced through a complex interplay of structured learning, community engagement & linguistic adaption. This synthesis suggests that education should move toward more inclusive & multimodal modes of learning. Recognizing that knowledge is socially constructed reinforces the need for flexible educational frameworks that accommodate student needs & cultural contexts.
Findings	<i>Effective pedagogy balances teacher-guided instruction with community-based, multilingual approaches for inclusive learning. Policies should bridge formal and informal literacy practices and recognize diverse linguistic experiences. While digital tools aid differentiated instruction, they should supplement and not replace human-centered teaching. Methodological diversity highlights learning as socially constructed and linguistically fluid. Ultimately, education should embrace multimodal knowledge production and foster adaptability.</i>					

Table 3. Translations of Higher Education & Student Learning through Sociomaterial Intra-Actions.

Sociomaterial Dimension	Higher Education & Student Learning			Reciprocal translation	Refutational translation	Line-of-argument synthesis
	<i>Study 1 - The Role of Resilience in Higher Education: A Meta-Ethnographic Analysis of Students' Experiences (Ang et al., 2021)</i>	<i>Study 2 - Non-Native English-Speaking (NNES) Students' English Academic Writing Experiences in Higher Education: A Meta-Ethnographic Qualitative Synthesis (Li, 2024)</i>	<i>Study 3 - Scaffolding Structures to Promote Widening Participation in Higher Education: A Meta-Ethnographic Analysis (Gummeson & Sjö Dahl Hammarland, 2024)</i>			
Pedagogical Frameworks	Resilience is a personal trait that enables students to navigate challenges.	Academic writing challenges arise from linguistic & institutional barriers , not personal deficits.	Higher education access requires structured institutional scaffolding , not just resilience.	All studies emphasize the importance of support structures for student success , whether through resilience, linguistic access or institutional scaffolding.	Resilience-based success vs. Structural support for students. Personal agency vs. Institutional responsibility.	Success in higher education is shaped by individual resilience & institutional support . Some research emphasizes student perseverance and others highlight structural barriers faced by non-native English-speaking (NNES) & marginalized students. A balanced approach is needed that integrates resilience-building strategies with systemic interventions to foster inclusion.
Institutional Policies	Institutions should promote resilience-building strategies but focus on student adaptation.	Policies should address structural inequities in language support & assessment.	Policies must actively create equitable pathways for marginalized students.	Policies must shift from individual responsibility to systemic inclusion , ensuring that students are not solely responsible for overcoming educational barriers .	Adaptation to barriers (Ang) vs. Policy-driven reform (Li & Gummeson & Sjö Dahl Hammarland).	Policies should address individual challenges & systemic inequalities by providing mentorship, language access programs, equitable participation frameworks. Institutions must actively create inclusive learning environments that support students from diverse linguistic & socio-economic backgrounds.
Technological Infrastructures	Technology can be used as a support tool for resilient learning but is not central.	Digital writing tools & online support systems are essential for NNES students.	Technology should be leveraged for inclusion, accessibility, & institutional support.	Technology is seen as a tool for accessibility , with digital resources playing a supportive role in resilience, writing skills & inclusive education .	Minimal role of tech in resilience (Ang) vs. Digital literacy as essential (Li) vs. Scaffolding success (Gummeson & Sjö Dahl Hammarland).	Technology serves as a critical tool for enabling higher education student resilience, writing proficiency & accessibility. Its role is supportive rather than central, reinforcing that institutional scaffolds must integrate tech resources to address linguistic & structural barriers rather than relying solely on student perseverance .

Research Methodologies	Meta-ethnographic synthesis of resilience studies , focusing on student experiences.	Qualitative synthesis of NNES student struggles, emphasizing systemic disadvantages.	Meta-ethnographic review of widening participation efforts in higher education.	Meta-ethnographic syntheses emphasize multiple lenses to capture student challenges & systemic inequities emphasizing equity-based transformations.	Focus on resilience (Ang) vs. Systemic inequities (Li) vs. Structural scaffolding (Gummesson & Sjödalhammarland).	The use of meta-ethnography & qualitative synthesis highlights the need for integrating resilience, equity & scaffolding frameworks to address systemic barriers in higher education.
Knowledge Production	Knowledge is individually shaped by overcoming adversity.	Knowledge is structured by linguistic inequities & systemic barriers.	Knowledge is co-constructed through institutional pathways & systemic supports.	Knowledge is not only personal (resilience) but also institutionally mediated (language access and policy driven inclusion)	Individual knowledge vs. Structural inequities vs. Institutional scaffolding.	Knowledge in higher education is produced through the interplay of individual resilience & systemic supports. Resilience is shaped by personal experiences, but academic success is determined by systemic factors such as linguistic accessibility, policy frameworks and inclusive learning environments.
Findings	<i>Resilience alone is insufficient, because true inclusion requires removing structural barriers. Disparities between higher education accessibility, brought by inclusive participation frameworks & systemic scaffolding, cannot be resolved by resilience alone. While technology provides accessibility support, it is the inclusive participation policies, resources & institutional scaffolds that ensure student success. Ultimately, resilience is central to both individual & institutional success, but it must be supported by policies, resources & inclusive environments.</i>					

Table 4. Translations of Educational Technology & Digital Learning through Sociomaterial Intra-Actions.

Sociomaterial Dimension	Educational Technology & Digital Learning			Reciprocal translation	Refutational translation	Line-of-argument synthesis
	<i>Study 1 - Teachers' Beliefs About Technology Integration in Early Childhood Education: A Meta-Ethnographical Synthesis of Qualitative Research (Mertala, 2019)</i>	<i>Study 2 - Evaluating Technological Interventions for Developing Teamwork Competency in Higher Education: A Systematic Review and Meta-Ethnography (Hu & Chan, 2024)</i>	<i>Study 3 - Student Voices in Creative Teaching Practices with Digital Media: A Meta-Ethnographic Research (López Fuentes, 2024)</i>			
Pedagogical Frameworks	Teachers are skeptical about technology's role in early education, emphasizing traditional play-based learning .	Technology enhances teamwork competencies in higher education, improving collaboration & engagement.	Digital media fosters creativity, student agency & multimodal expression in learning.	All studies explore technology role in education , ranging from skepticism in early childhood education to teamwork development & creativity in higher education .	Traditional, play-based early learning (Mertala) vs. Technology-driven teamwork and collaboration (Hu & Chan) vs. Digital media for creative learning (López Fuentes).	The role of technology in education varies across different levels of learning. Early childhood educators express skepticism toward digital tools. They prioritize traditional learning experiences. However, higher education researchers advocate for technology-enhanced collaboration & creativity. A balanced approach is needed to ensure that technology is integrated in developmentally appropriate ways .
Institutional Policies	Institutional policies often push for tech integration, but teachers resist due to developmental concerns.	Institutional policies should support digital teamwork environments & tech-based pedagogies .	Policies should prioritize student-centered, creative & participatory digital learning approaches.	Policies should address educators' perspectives on technology & adapt strategies based on developmental stages .	Resistance to policy-driven tech adoption (Mertala) vs. Institutional support for tech-based teamwork (Hu & Chan) vs. Need for student-centered digital learning policies (López Fuentes).	Policies that promote technology integration should consider educators' perspectives & students' developmental needs . Rather than a universal push for digital learning, institutions should adopt context-sensitive strategies that align with different pedagogical goals . This will ensure that technology enhances rather than disrupts learning experiences.
Technological Infrastructures	Technology is seen as an optional supplement rather than a central tool for learning.	Technology is an essential medium for developing collaboration, communication & problem-solving skills .	Technology is a tool for student empowerment , encouraging active rather than passive consumption.	Technology is seen as a context-dependent tool where its value depends on how it is integrated into pedagogy.	Technology as supplementary (Mertala) vs. Technology as essential (Hu & Chan) vs. Empowering	Technology is framed as both an enabler & a disruptor. While it fosters teamwork & creativity in higher education, its role in early education remains challenged. The differences in digital tool adoption show that its impact is mediated, suggesting that institutions must craft critical frameworks for technology use .

Research Methodologies	Meta-ethnographic synthesis of teachers' perspectives on early childhood tech use .	Systematic review & meta-ethnography of digital teamwork interventions in university settings.	Meta-ethnographic research exploring student voices in digital learning environments.	Meta-ethnographic approaches provide insights into differing perspectives , showcasing qualitative perspectives on digital learning .	practices (López Fuentes). Structured synthesis (Mertala) vs. Systematic review (Hu & Chan) vs. Student perspectives (López Fuentes).	Qualitative meta-ethnographies & systematic reviews highlight the voices of educators & students engaging with digital tools. These diverse approaches create a more nuanced understanding of balanced, evidence-based adoption of digital learning.
Knowledge Production	Knowledge is shaped by hands-on experiences & critical reflections that inform digital learning goals.	Knowledge is co-constructed by multimodal & digital collaborative team-based learning experiences.	Knowledge is shaped by student agency & multimodal expression in creative digital practices .	Knowledge is constructed differently when digital media is integrated , reflecting diversity in educational outcomes.	Knowledge through teacher resistance (Mertala) vs. Knowledge co-constructed via collaboration (Hu & Chan) vs. Student multimodal knowledge (López Fuentes).	Knowledge is produced in multiple ways through digital learning, depending on context. A balanced framework is required to accommodate multimodality & creativity, while remaining developmentally appropriate.
Findings	<i>Technology use should be developmentally appropriate. Early education should emphasize play-based learning & higher education should benefit from digital collaboration. Policies must be context-sensitive & align digital learning with pedagogical goals rather than apply it uniformly. Technology that acts as both an enabler & curator can enhance engagement when used thoughtfully.</i>					

Table 5. Translations of Educational Justice, Policy & Teacher Training through Sociomaterial Intra-Actions.

Sociomaterial Dimension	Educational Justice, Policy & Teacher Training			Reciprocal translation	Refutational translation	Line-of-argument synthesis
	<i>Study 1.</i> <i>Investigating the Education of Preservice Teachers for Inclusive Education: A Meta-Ethnography (Pérez-Castejón & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021)</i>	<i>Study 2.</i> <i>Critical Ethnographic Ethnographies of Education and for Social and Educational Transformation: A Meta-Ethnography (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021)</i>	<i>Study 3.</i> <i>Constructing a Conceptual Framework for Professional Identity Development in International Social Work Students: A Meta-Ethnographic Review (Yao, 2021)</i>			
Pedagogical Frameworks	Inclusive education requires well-trained teachers who can adapt pedagogy to diverse student needs .	Education should be a tool for social transformation , challenging existing power structures and inequities.	Professional identity in social work is developed through reflective practice, mentorship & community engagement.	All studies emphasize the role of education in shaping social & professional identities , whether through inclusion, activism or professional development.	Teacher education for inclusion (Pérez-Castejón & Vigo-Arrazola) vs. Education as a tool for systemic change (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola) vs. Professional identity formation in social work (Yao).	Teacher training, educational activism & professional identity development intersect in shaping the role of education for justice & inclusion . While teacher education focuses on classroom inclusion, critical ethnographies highlight systemic inequities & professional identity formation emphasizes mentorship & reflective practice. These perspectives must be integrated to prepare educators for both practical teaching & social change.
Institutional Policies	Institutional policies should prioritize teacher training programs that emphasize inclusion.	Institutional policies often resist change , reinforcing systemic inequities rather than fostering inclusion.	Institutional policies should support identity formation by creating mentorship opportunities and community-based learning.	Institutional policies play a dual role , either enabling change (teacher education & mentorship) or resisting transformation (systemic barriers in policy).	Policies that promote teacher inclusion (Pérez-Castejón & Vigo-Arrazola) vs. Policies that emphasize transformation (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola) vs. Policies that support identity development in professional fields (Yao).	Policies must support inclusive teacher training & mentorship programs, otherwise risk systemic inequities. Institutions must move beyond performative commitments to dismantle barriers & implement transformative policies that foster real inclusion & equity in education.

Technological Infrastructures	Technology is useful in supporting inclusive pedagogy but is not the central focus.	Technology is often shaped by institutional biases , reinforcing existing educational hierarchies.	Technology facilitates professional networking & identity development but is secondary to social interactions.	Technology is acknowledged as a secondary but useful tool in supporting inclusion, activism & professional identity formation.	Technology as a support tool for inclusion (Pérez-Castejón & Vigo-Arrazola) vs. Technology as an instrument of institutional power (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola) vs. Technology as a networking tool in professional identity formation (Yao).	Technology plays a secondary but supportive role in teacher training, activism & professional identity development. Digital tools can facilitate networking, mentorship & social inclusion, but their effectiveness depends on institutional policies & pedagogical use. Policies must ensure that technology is used to support inclusion rather than reinforce existing inequities.
Research Methodologies	Meta-ethnographic synthesis of teacher education studies focusing on inclusive practices.	Critical ethnographic analysis of systemic educational injustices & educational transformation.	Meta-ethnographic synthesis of studies on professional identity development.	Methodologically, all studies use qualitative synthesis (meta-ethnographies, critical ethnographies) to address educational injustices, transformation & professional development.	Meta-ethnography for teacher training (Pérez-Castejón & Vigo-Arrazola) vs. Critical ethnography for systemic inequities (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola) vs. Meta-ethnography of professional identity (Yao).	Use of qualitative meta-ethnographies & critical ethnographic methods provides in-depth insights into how educational practices shape systemic inclusion & professional identity. These methodologies highlight the importance of synthesis & reflexivity in developing educational justice & professional formation.
Knowledge Production	Knowledge is co-constructed through teacher training, reflection, and professional development.	Knowledge is shaped by historical, political, social, economic & cultural agency.	Knowledge is developed through mentorship, professional communities & social interactions.	Knowledge is co-constructed through training, mentorship & activism.	Knowledge in the realm of educational justice (Pérez-Castejón & Vigo-Arrazola) vs. Knowledge as systemic transformation (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola) vs. Knowledge in professional identity shared by Yao.	Knowledge is shaped by multiple contexts including teacher education, systemic transformation & professional training structures. It is both constructed & contested. Educators & policymakers must critically examine how knowledge is produced & circulated to shape inclusive educational environments.
Findings	<i>Teacher training, activism & professional development must be integrated with traditional education fostering inclusion, activism critiquing systemic inequities & identity formation supporting reflective teaching. Policies must go beyond performative commitments to implement sustainable equity-driven reforms. Technology is</i>					

useful but secondary; must reinforce and not undermine inclusivity. Knowledge is co-constructed through training, activism & teacher identity formation. Ultimately, knowledge in education is shaped by institutional structures & activism, requiring critical engagement to foster justice-oriented teaching.

Table 6. Translations of Educational Assessment, Health & Fairness through Sociomaterial Intra-Actions.

Sociomaterial Dimension	Educational Assessment, Health & Fairness		Reciprocal translation	Refutational translation	Line-of-argument synthesis
	<i>Study 1.</i> <i>Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of Physical Activity in Schools: A Meta-Ethnography (Alcántara Porcar & Rodríguez-Martin, 2022)</i>	<i>Study 2.</i> <i>Re-Conceptualizing Classroom Assessment Fairness: A Systematic Meta-Ethnography of Assessment Literature and Beyond (Rasooli, Zandi, & DeLuca, 2017)</i>			
Pedagogical Frameworks	Physical activity in schools is shaped by parental and teacher perceptions of its role in education.	Assessment fairness is essential to equitable education, ensuring all students are evaluated based on just principles.	Both studies examine how institutional structures shape student experiences , whether in physical activity or assessment fairness .	Physical activity as an educational priority (Alcántara Porcar & Rodríguez-Martin) vs. Assessment fairness as the foundation of education (Rasooli et al.).	Educational fairness encompasses both physical well-being (through school-based physical activity) & fair assessment practices. While one perspective prioritizes student health as a critical component of education, another focuses on equitable grading systems that ensure academic justice. A balanced framework should recognize that physical well-being & fair assessment contribute to holistic student development.
Institutional Policies	Institutional policies on physical education vary, often reflecting broader societal & cultural norms .	Institutional policies should ensure fairness in assessments but often reinforce systemic inequities .	Policies play a decisive role in structuring fairness , either in assessment practices or physical education opportunities .	Policies reflecting societal norms (Alcántara Porcar & Rodríguez-Martin) vs. Policies that claim fairness but reinforce inequities (Rasooli et al.).	Institutional policies play a crucial role in shaping student well-being & assessment fairness. Policies governing physical activity in schools often reflect societal norms rather than educational priorities, while assessment fairness is framed as an institutional commitment but often reproduces structural inequities. Education policies must actively ensure that both student health & fair academic evaluation are prioritized.
Technological Infrastructures	Technology is not a central factor but can be used to track & assess student physical activity levels.	Technology can be used to improve transparency & consistency in assessment but may also introduce biases.	Technology can support both fairness and physical activity tracking but is not the central factor in	Technology as an optional tracking tool (Alcántara Porcar & Rodríguez-Martin) vs. Technology as a means	Technology is used in both domains as a tool for measuring physical activity in schools & as a means of increasing assessment transparency . While digital tools can enhance fairness in assessment, they also risk reinforcing inequities if not

			shaping educational equity.	of ensuring or distorting fairness (Rasooli et al.).	implemented critically. Similarly, fitness tracking technologies in schools must be integrated thoughtfully to support rather than control student well-being.
Research Methodologies	Meta-ethnographic synthesis of qualitative research on perceptions of school-based physical activity.	Systematic meta-ethnographic synthesis of fairness in classroom assessments across various educational contexts.	Meta-ethnographies provide insights into how institutional contexts shape physical activity & assessment fairness in relation to student well-being.	Meta-ethnography of school-based physical activity perceptions (Alcántara Porcar & Rodríguez-Martín) vs. Meta-ethnography of fairness discourse in assessments (Rasooli et al.).	Meta-ethnographies & systematic reviews provide insights into the structures influencing fairness in education. These methodologies reveal how the same societal structures & facilitators shape well-being & assessment equity, highlighting the need for policies that address both physical & academic justice.
Knowledge Production	Knowledge about physical education is shaped by cultural beliefs & educational priorities.	Knowledge is situated, shaped by institutional, political & social dynamics.	Knowledge in both domains is socially and institutionally framed.	Knowledge is shaped by cultural beliefs and norms (Alcántara Porcar & Rodríguez-Martín) vs. Knowledge institutionally framed to ensure fairness (Rasooli et al.).	Knowledge in the domain is shaped by institutional priorities, whether emphasizing physical health or fair assessment. Both are socially constructed processes that require continuous re-evaluation to ensure they serve student needs rather than reproduce systemic convenience. Education & physical movement must be integrated with fairness in both assessment & physical education contexts.
Findings	<i>Physical health & academic fairness are interconnected which requires a balance between physical activity & equitable assessment. Institutional policies must align with equity goals & ensure that physical education reflects educational priorities & assessment practices remain unbiased. While technology can enhance transparency through fitness tracking & digital grading, it may also reproduce or critically implement inequities. Meta-ethnographies reveal how policies shape both student well-being & academic outcomes. Ultimately, fairness in education is not static but must be continuously reassessed to prioritize student needs over institutional convenience.</i>				

How Stage 6: Synthesizing Translations

Stage 6 is the core interpretive phase where key insights from the reciprocal, refutational and line-of-argument translations are brought together to develop a higher-order synthesis (Hardman & Bishop, 2018). This stage moves beyond simply comparing studies (Stage 5) and constructs an integrated, theoretical and conceptual interpretation of new understandings (France et al., 2015).

In this stage, I developed a higher-order interpretation by integrating insights from reciprocal, refutational & line-of-argument translations. Using rhizomatic thinking, I embraced complexity rather than imposing a single interpretation. I positioned differentiation, family literacy, and translanguaging as complementary and not opposing models. Grounded in agential realism, I recognized the synthesis as an emergent process shaped by methodological entanglements and power structures. This stage ensured that the synthesis was a critical engagement with how education is structured, mediated, and challenged across different contexts. Each of the five translation tables in stage 5 (see Tables 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) revealed several interwoven insights:

Table 2: General Education & Pedagogical Approaches

Table 2 highlights the need for flexible, student-centered pedagogy by synthesizing perspectives on family literacy, differentiated instruction, and translanguaging pedagogy. Some studies emphasize structured and teacher-led learning. Others advocate for socially emergent or linguistically fluid approaches. The synthesis suggests that instead of viewing these models as conflicting, they can be integrated into a hybrid framework that combines structured differentiation, community-based literacy, and multilingual engagement. This approach ensures inclusive, adaptable education that responds to diverse learner needs while recognizing technology as a secondary support tool rather than the primary driver of pedagogy.

Table 3: Higher Education & Student Learning

Table 3 emphasizes the importance of support structures in higher education. It highlights how resilience-building, linguistic accessibility and institutional scaffolding contribute to student success. The resilience is often seen as an individual trait, but the synthesis argues that success is institutionally mediated through inclusive policies, mentorship programs, and digital tools such as writing aids and online learning platforms. A key tension arises between personal perseverance and systemic barriers, particularly for non-native English-speaking students. The synthesis proposes a dual framework, recognizing that both individual resilience and institutional support are essential for ensuring equitable access and success in higher education.

Table 4: Educational Technology & Digital Learning

Table 4 highlights that technology's role in education is context-dependent and varies across developmental stages and pedagogical needs. Early childhood educators are skeptical of digital tools (Mertala, 2019). On the other hand, higher education scholars advocate for technology-enhanced collaboration (Hu & Chan, 2024), where digital media is seen as a creative learning tool (López Fuentes, 2024). The key debate is whether technology should be a central learning tool or a supplementary aid, with tensions between tech skepticism in early education, its necessity for teamwork in higher education, and its creative potential for students. The synthesis suggests that technology should be thoughtfully integrated based on pedagogical relevance rather than universally applied.

Table 5: Educational Justice, Policy & Teacher Training

Table 5 highlights how education shapes social and professional identities through inclusive teacher training (Pérez-Castejón & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021), critical ethnography for systemic change (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2024), and professional identity formation in social work (Yao, 2021). Institutional policies serve as both enablers and barriers. They foster inclusion in teacher education and reinforce systemic inequities. Technology is viewed as a secondary tool for networking and activism rather than a driver of transformation. The key debate is whether education should prioritize professional training, systemic critique, or mentorship-based identity formation. The synthesis suggests that equitable education requires a balance between teacher training, activism, and professional development to create meaningful change.

Table 6: Educational Assessment, Health & Fairness

The reciprocal translation in Table 6 connects physical activity in schools and assessment fairness (Alcántara Porcuna & Rodríguez-Martín, 2022), showing that institutional policies shape student well-being and academic equity. While one study focuses on how societal norms influence physical activity policies, the other critiques how assessment fairness is framed as equitable but often reinforces systemic inequalities. In both cases, technology is used as a tool for transparency and tracking but does not directly address deeper structural inequities. The key takeaway is that both physical activity and assessment fairness are institutionally mediated, with policy decisions playing a critical role in determining student access, equity, and success.

Table 6 refutes physical activity as a social norm (Alcántara Porcuna & Rodríguez-Martín, 2022) with assessment fairness as an institutional discourse (Rasooli et al., 2018). While one study examines how physical education is shaped by social expectations, the other critiques how assessment policies claim to be fair but often reinforce inequalities. This contradiction exposes how education prioritizes different aspects of fairness, whether in physical engagement or standardized evaluation.

The line of argument synthesis connects physical activity in schools and assessment fairness, demonstrating that both are institutionalized forms of fairness in

education. Instead of treating these as separate domains, it argues for a holistic fairness framework that integrates student well-being with equitable academic evaluation.

To conclude, by synthesizing insights across Tables 2 - 6, reciprocal translation revealed alignment in how education is structured, mediated, and supported through policies, pedagogy, and technology.

Across the five domains, this synthesis revealed several key takeaways:

- **Hybrid models are essential:** Structured and emergent learning approaches should not be treated as opposing paradigms but as complementary frameworks.
- **Institutional policies shape educational justice:** Rather than maintaining performative equity measures, institutions must actively dismantle barriers in assessment, learning environments and professional training.
- **Technology should support human-centered learning:** Digital tools are valuable but should never replace student-centered, inclusive pedagogical strategies.
- **Meta-ethnographies and qualitative research are crucial:** These methods provide rich insights into systemic inequalities, student experiences and policy effectiveness.
- **Fairness in education is multidimensional:** A truly equitable educational system must integrate academic fairness and student well-being into its core policies and practices.

How Stage 7: Expressing the Synthesis

The synthesis process ensures a coherent integration of findings by identifying key alignments, contradictions, and conceptual relationships across studies. Theoretical and methodological considerations are addressed through sociomateriality, rhizomatic thinking and agential realism. They allow for a fluid and non-hierarchical interpretation of knowledge. The researcher's role in shaping meaning is acknowledged through reflexivity, ensuring the synthesis is critical rather than descriptive. This study demonstrates that using meta-ethnography to conduct a meta-meta-ethnographic synthesis is feasible, while also revealing the methodological challenges and theoretical insights that arise from this higher-order approach. Ultimately, this synthesis demonstrates that meta-ethnography is not just about summarizing studies but also about actively interrogating how knowledge is produced, mediated, and contested within education and research.

Discussion

This meta-meta-ethnographic review demonstrates the feasibility of synthesizing meta-ethnographies to generate higher-order insights into education, pedagogy, and digital learning. By applying Noblit & Hare's (1988) framework, this study reveals how institutional policies, pedagogical frameworks, and technology shape knowledge production and reinforce the entangled nature of educational research.

This meta-meta-ethnographic synthesis illustrates how existing meta-ethnographies in education collectively portray education as a dynamic, co-constructed

process mediated by social, institutional, and technological forces. The synthesis underscores the need for hybrid pedagogical models that integrate structured and emergent learning approaches, and institutional policies that move beyond performative equity measures. It also found that fairness in education must be viewed holistically, encompassing both academic equity and student well-being. These insights that emerged from this meta-meta-ethnographic synthesis found that hybrid pedagogical models integrating structured and emergent learning approaches are needed. Also, institutional policies must move beyond performative equity measures, and fairness in education should be viewed holistically to encompass both academic equity and student well-being.

While this study demonstrates the potential of meta-meta-ethnography, it is limited by its focus on 14 meta-ethnographies in education. Future research should expand to other disciplines, integrate computational synthesis methods, and explore how AI-driven tools can support qualitative synthesis. By refining meta-ethnographic methodologies, scholars can enhance the rigor and applicability of qualitative synthesis in education and beyond.

Limitations and Possible Solutions of This Review

While this pilot meta-meta-ethnographic study provides valuable insights into the synthesis of meta-ethnographies, it also presents several methodological, theoretical and practical challenges. The study synthesized only 14 meta-ethnographies, which, while diverse, may not fully capture the breadth of meta-ethnographic research across different disciplines. Findings are primarily focused on education, pedagogy, and digital learning, limiting their applicability to other fields. Future studies could incorporate a larger and more diverse set of meta-ethnographies, including those from other disciplines such as healthcare, sociology, and cultural studies. Combining meta-ethnography with quantitative synthesis techniques (e.g., systematic reviews or bibliometric analysis) could triangulate findings and enhance credibility.

There could be a double-layered interpretation bias. Since meta-ethnographies already involve interpretation, adding another layer of synthesis increases the risk of over-abstracting findings and losing contextual richness. By prioritizing ethical sensitivity in synthesis researchers should develop guidelines for ethical meta-synthesis that ensure original participant voices and contexts remain central to the analysis. Maintaining a reflexive approach by engaging in reflexive journaling throughout the synthesis process to document interpretive decisions would help minimize the bias.

While this review demonstrates the potential of meta-meta-ethnography, it also highlights key methodological, theoretical, and ethical challenges. By addressing these limitations through expanded sampling, methodological rigor, theoretical triangulation, digital integration, and ethical reflexivity, future research can refine the meta-ethnographic approach to ensure it remains robust, inclusive, and theoretically generative.

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SOCIAL MEDIA AND FILMS AS DRIVERS OF PUBLIC AWARENESS ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

Human trafficking is still a big problem in Nigeria; thus, we need to find good ways to raise public awareness. This study looks into how films and social media might help people in Southwest Nigeria learn more about human trafficking. The study used correlation and paired sample t-test analysis on a quantitative survey of 400 people. The results showed a weak link ($r = -0.069$, $p = 0.168$) between media exposure and consciousness, which means that passively consuming media doesn't have much of an effect. There is a big gap ($t = -73.420$, $p < 0.001$) between how people think they are exposed to media and how they actually are, which shows that people know how powerful media can be. The study illustrates that we need better media literacy, fact-checking mechanisms, participatory content, and policy-backed efforts to close this gap. Using films and social media in awareness campaigns can help people become more informed and involved in their communities. The paper stresses that education changes how people think about social issues into informed advocacy. For the media to be most useful in the fight against trafficking, it needs to work with teachers, politicians, and people from civil society. In the end, the study adds to the conversation about media literacy and social studies by calling for smart media use that gives people the tools they need to recognize, question, and fight human trafficking.

Keywords: social media, films, human trafficking, public awareness, media influence

Introduction

With sub-Saharan Africa, with Nigeria in particular, suffering extreme forms of exploitation through forced labour, sexual assault, and organ trafficking, human trafficking continues to be a worldwide epidemic affecting more than 40 million people (Koranne, 2022). Poverty, inadequate institutions, gender inequality, and systematic corruption aggravate Nigeria's role as a source, transit, and destination for trafficking people (Elechi et al., 2007). Although legislation and enforcement systems are essential in combating trafficking, this paper underlines the complementing power of public education—especially via digital platforms and film media—to raise awareness, mobilize citizens, and promote civic involvement. Mekanjuola and Ayantunji (2024) also support new ways of teaching that use multimedia resources like movies and AI-based simulations to get students and teachers to think more about trafficking and other social concerns.

Drawing on Paulo Freire's (1970) idea of critical pedagogy, which sees education as a practice of freedom, this paper argues that media consumption can be more than passive reception; it can be a venue for public pedagogy where people question their social reality and as a result create critical awareness. This study investigates the twofold function of media as both educational and civic tools by means of an examination of how people interact with anti-trafficking stories in films and social media. Wali-Essien et al. (2025) say that community-driven storytelling through film and digital participation has become a powerful way to fight trafficking narratives, especially in places with few resources. It bets on the changing power of education and at the same time tries to implement public pedagogy by presenting media interaction as a civic learning tool. Recent studies on educational innovation in Nigeria fit this focus on digital technologies and inclusive civic education. For instance, Ayantunji et al. (2024a) underline the need of digital transformation in improving inclusive learning contexts, hence proving the power of technology to democratize access and foster critical involvement.

Public awareness of trafficking stays patchy even with government-led programs like those of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). Bello and Okonjo (2025) note that legal changes by themselves are not enough to break down deep-seated exploitation networks; focused awareness and education are absolutely vital. This fits UNESCO's (2017) campaign for education that enables human rights and sustainable development by means of informed actions.

Focusing on civic responsibility, human rights, and media literacy, the social studies curriculum offers a perfect venue for introducing students to the reality of trafficking. Social sciences, according to Fukushima et al. (2021), have the ability to question systemic inequities and encourage democratic participation goals closely related to anti-trafficking education. This study places its inquiry at the crossroads of education, media, and civic engagement particularly in Southwest Nigeria, where urbanization and a thriving film industry—see Nollywood—create a dynamic environment for media-driven public pedagogy

One must consider that media exposure does not always lead to awareness or advocacy. Assumptions regarding media power, critics astutely point out, have to consider algorithmic filtering, false information, and unequal digital access. According to Elechi et al. (2007), the impact of awareness efforts may be undermined when audiences are uninformed or unable to access correct reflecting material. Therefore, this paper questions not only whether people

consume pertinent material but also how they emotionally, intellectually, and critically interact with it; therefore, criticizing both the substance and consumption of anti-trafficking media.

Particularly when integrated with social studies, media literacy education helps students to analyze, examine, and respond to digital and visual narratives. Both Hobbs (2010) and Crawford et al. (2025) highlight how media education helps students to be ethical participants in public debate and meaning-makers. While social media sites like Instagram and X (previously Twitter) allow real-time activism and public debate (Mahiwal et al. 2024), films and documentaries elicit emotional reactions that intensify empathy and moral reflection (Chapin et al., 2019; Strydom, 2021). Makanjuola et al. (2021) show how well documentaries teach in non-formal environments like market communities to improve environmental literacy—an approach that may be modified for civic education and trafficking awareness. Among young people, these platforms are especially potent since they provide ways to tell stories, organize friends, and obtain civic material typically left off official courses.

Especially in Nigeria, existing studies hardly connect people's lived experiences of media with their formal education despite this potential. Recent studies have shown that media material and digital technologies are becoming more important for raising awareness about trafficking and getting people involved in their communities (Olisah et al., 2024; Okeyere et al., 2024; Reeves et al., 2024). These studies show that social media and films can both teach people about human trafficking and change the way people think about and respond to it. One must investigate how media material, whether from Nollywood movies or digital campaigns, interacts with what people learn (or do not learn) in schools. Among other civic projects, social studies education stands out as a key entry point for media-based anti-trafficking awareness. This paper aims to add to the body of work on human trafficking prevention as well as to inform curriculum change in Nigerian education by investigating how social media and film support or question civic knowledge and involvement.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent do social media influence public awareness of human trafficking in Southwest Nigeria?
2. How do films contribute to public awareness of human trafficking in Southwest Nigeria?
3. What are the comparative impacts of social media and films in raising awareness of human trafficking?

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design, which is suitable for understanding the relationship between social media, films, and public awareness of human trafficking in Southwest Nigeria. The target population for this study is comprised of residents of Southwest Nigeria (27,722,432), which includes Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti states. Several important factors that make Southwest Nigeria suitable for this research guided selection: the area's great exposure to digital and film media, its dense and varied population, the reported incidents of human trafficking and cybercrime, and its strategic sociocultural and economic relevance inside Nigeria. These elements taken together create a rich environment for

investigating how social media and films shape public awareness, perception, and reaction to problems connected to human trafficking. To determine the sample size for this study, the researchers employed Taro Yamane's formula to arrive at 400 participants.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N (e)^2}$$

Where:

n = Sample size

N = Total Population (27,722,432)

e = Margin of error (Commonly 5% or 0.05)

Since the researchers are using a stratified random sampling technique, the sample shall be distributed proportionally based on the population of each state. The formula for proportional allocation is:

$$n_i = \frac{N_i}{N} \times n$$

Where:

n_i = Sample size for each state

N_i = Population of each state

N = Total population (27,722,432)

n = Total sample size (400)

Table 1. *Proportional Sampling of Selected States in Southwest Nigeria*

States	Population (N_i)	Proportional Sample (n_i)
Lagos	9,113,605	$\frac{9,113,605}{27,722,432} \times 400 \approx 131$
Oyo	3,751,140	$\frac{3,751,140}{27,722,432} \times 400 \approx 54$
Ogun	3,751,140	$\frac{3,751,140}{27,722,432} \times 400 \approx 54$
Ondo	3,460,877	$\frac{3,460,877}{27,722,432} \times 400 \approx 50$
Osun	3,416,959	$\frac{3,416,959}{27,722,432} \times 400 \approx 49$
Ekiti	2,398,957	$\frac{2,398,957}{27,722,432} \times 400 \approx 35$
Total	27,722,432	400

The researchers carefully observed that to guarantee subgroups with different media consumption patterns across states were sufficiently represented in the sample, the study used a stratified random sampling approach. The sampling method gave significant insights on general perceptions of media impact on human trafficking awareness and allowed wide demographic coverage. The study, however, neither pre-selected participants based on previous involvement with anti-trafficking education or civic projects nor included a qualitative evaluation of the kind or quality of media material ingested. Therefore, the results mostly show public views on media influence rather than calculated reactions to particular trafficking-related material. A systematic questionnaire meant to assess respondents' exposure to social media and films, their knowledge of human trafficking, and their views of media influence gathered primary data. To allow efficient quantification of views and experiences, the questionnaire was made up of closed-ended questions based on a 4-point Likert scale (from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). Digital teaching methods including virtual team teaching, as researched by Ayantunji et al. (2024b), offers fascinating fresh insights on how pre-service teachers engage with digital platforms to foster civic learning and collaboration. This emphasizes the importance of including digital media literacy in social studies education teacher training. Still, the lack of qualitative data such as open-ended answers, focus group discussions, or classroom observations limited the depth of analysis on how participants interact with and internalize anti-trafficking narratives. Future research should include qualitative elements to reflect the richness, subtlety, and diversity of media engagement. Such strategies would provide more in-depth analysis of how people read, challenge, or emotionally react to anti-trafficking messaging. In social studies education environments, where critical reflection, media literacy, and personal experiences interact with curriculum objectives, this is especially pertinent. Adding qualitative aspects would not only increase the interpretative validity of future results but also make the suggestions for media policy and civic education more significant.

Results and Discussion

RQ1: To what extent do social media influence public awareness of human trafficking in Southwest Nigeria?

Table 2: Correlation Table Showing Relationships Between Awareness of Human Trafficking and Social Media and Film Exposure

		Exposure to social media and films	Awareness of human trafficking
Exposure to social media and films	Pearson Correlation	1	-.069
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.168
	N	400	400
Awareness of human trafficking	Pearson Correlation	-.069	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.168	
	N	400	400

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The findings in Table 2 indicate a weak negative correlation ($r = -0.069$, $p = 0.168$) between awareness of human trafficking and exposure to social media and films. This suggests that passive media consumption alone does not significantly contribute to public awareness of human trafficking in Southwest Nigeria. These findings support Reeves et al. (2024), who

underline that the degree of awareness is significantly influenced by the quality of interaction with media, including content credibility and active participation versus passive media exposure. Olisah et al. (2024) bolster this perspective even further by contending that active participation with educational campaigns and advocacy initiatives rather than passive consumption of media material produces a genuine knowledge of human trafficking. Consistent with these points of view, Okyere et al. (2021) contend that increasing awareness is more successful with educational policies emphasizing media literacy and active involvement. This emphasizes the need of including interactive and participatory educational approaches such as digital literacy campaigns and government-backed initiatives to create a more knowledgeable society able to fight human trafficking.

RQ2: How do films contribute to public awareness of human trafficking in Southwest Nigeria?

Table 3: *A descriptive Statistics Table Showing films contribute Awareness of Human Trafficking.*

		Exposure to social media and films	Awareness of human trafficking	Perception of media influence on human trafficking awareness	Challenges in Using social media and Films for Awareness
N	Valid	400	400	400	400
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		10.45	27.85	85.64	85.53
Std. Deviation		2.360	13.445	8.687	8.563
Percentiles	100	33.00	87.00	87.00	87.00

In Table 3, though respondents said they had rather little exposure to trafficking-related media (Mean = 10.45), their knowledge of human trafficking stayed fairly high (Mean = 27.85), and their view of media's impact was quite favourable (Mean = 85.64). A major drawback of this result, therefore, is the statistical measurement of media exposure, which ignores the quality, credibility, or framing of the media material consumed. Media environments are being influenced more and more by algorithmic filters, platform censorship, and access inequity, which can restrict what people see and how they understand it.

Elechi et al. (2007) share this worry, contending that incorrect information, media bias, and restricted access to reliable sources can greatly compromise the effectiveness of media in generating awareness. Ensuring digital safety and critical involvement is vital as media ecosystems get increasingly complicated. Emphasizing the need of a complete cybersecurity framework in Nigeria's digital education system, Makanjuola and Ayantunji (2024) underline the vulnerabilities pupils experience when accessing online material, especially trafficking-related content. Thus, although attendees might view media as powerful, the real awareness produced might differ greatly depending on the purity and depth of the content received. This finding underlines the importance of media literacy education and content curation initiatives to guarantee that awareness efforts are not just visible but also honest, inclusive, and representative of the multifaceted reality of human trafficking.

RQ3: What are the comparative impacts of public awareness of human trafficking and perception of media influence on Human Trafficking Awareness?

Table 4: A Paired Sample t-Test Analysis Comparing Public Awareness and Perception of Media Influence on Human Trafficking Awareness.

Exposure and Awareness of Human Trafficking	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig. (P)
Awareness of human trafficking	400	27.85	13.445	399	-73.420	.000
Perception of media influence on human trafficking awareness	400	85.64	8.687			

The findings in Table 4 reveal that although both social media and films are perceived as important tools in raising awareness of human trafficking, their comparative impacts diverge in meaningful ways. While participants expressed emotional connection and retained information better from films, social media offered immediacy and interactivity, though sometimes lacking depth. This contrast illustrates a potential educational tension—between passive reception and critical engagement—which calls for a more transformative approach to media education.

Wali-Essien et al. (2025) correctly assert that integrating media into social studies education promotes civic participation and fosters a deeper understanding of complex social issues. However, this assertion could be more robustly grounded in Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy. Freire posits that education should empower learners to become *active meaning-makers*, capable of *naming their world*, critically interrogating reality, and engaging in transformational action. Applying this to media use, students should not merely consume content but learn to question its sources, narratives, and omissions.

This research suggests that the gap between perception and actual awareness, as shown by the weak correlation ($r = -0.069$, $p = 0.168$), is partially due to the lack of *critical literacy skills* among media consumers. While respondents perceive media as powerful, they may not possess the analytical tools to decode messages or link media portrayals to real-world trafficking systems. This gap indicates that media-based anti-trafficking education must go beyond information delivery to include reflexive practices, participatory analysis, and dialogic learning principles central to Freire's pedagogy. Therefore, social studies curricula that incorporate films and social media should actively engage students in analyzing and critiquing these media forms. Instead of treating learners as passive recipients of advocacy messages, educators must rely on them as *co-creators of meaning*, facilitating classroom environments where students question, debate, and reinterpret media messages on human trafficking. This approach not only enhances media literacy but also situates learners as empowered agents of social transformation.

Recommendations

Based on what the study found, the following recommendations are made to raise public awareness, improve how the media covers the issue, and make it easier for different sectors to work together to fight human trafficking:

1. Educational institutions should include digital literacy courses in their curricula to provide students and communities the tools to critically evaluate media material and identify exploitative practices in trafficking-related media.
2. To raise direct involvement with human trafficking concerns, media producers should concentrate on producing culturally relevant and interesting films and social media campaigns that speak to local audiences, especially in educational settings.
3. Increasing the influence of media-driven trafficking awareness campaigns depends on government, media professionals, and civil society organizations working together to guarantee their coordination and broad distribution.
4. Media organizations should set strong verification systems and provide genuine, fact-based reporting on human trafficking as top priority to fight false information, hence supporting educational initiatives and stopping the dissemination of damaging misconceptions.
5. To engage consumers more deeply and build enduring relationships with the material, media companies should investigate creative and interactive forms such virtual reality, narrative apps, and gamification.
6. Governments could implement rules requiring media outlets to include material raising awareness of human trafficking, thus guaranteeing regular visibility and wider distribution of anti-trafficking messaging.
7. To augment media-based awareness campaigns and offer practical actions for advocacy and prevention in local settings, civil society organizations can encourage community-driven projects including workshops, film screenings, and debates.

Conclusion

This paper underlines how important media, especially films and social media, is in shaping public knowledge of human trafficking. The results show a significant difference between participants' actual exposure to trafficking-specific material and their view of media's possible impact. This difference emphasizes the importance of more deliberate and calculated media use in educational settings. Media can be a transformational tool only if it informs people and involves them in ongoing discussion and critical analysis. This study calls for educational initiatives combining media literacy with civic education to promote more knowledge and proactive opposition to exploitation. Although the research alludes to several educational projects generally, a more concentrated pedagogical perspective is crucial. Social studies education consistently stressed in this paper becomes a pertinent curricular area for integrating anti-trafficking conversation. It offers a systematic framework for developing ethical media involvement, civic duty, and critical thinking. Particularly in teacher education and secondary social studies classes, media narratives can be questioned, internet activism promoted, and students prepared to spot and oppose human trafficking. Future studies should investigate the junction between people's media consumption and their participation in social studies classes to better understand how formal education influences public awareness and advocacy on trafficking-related concerns.

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