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Advance Knowledge for Executives

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This review aims to synthesize current literature on ethical research practices and data collection methods in the behavioral sciences, social sciences, and humanities. It specifically focuses on aligning methodological rigor with ethical responsibility and highlights regulatory guidance relevant to research involving human participants in Thailand.

Methods: The study employed a qualitative systematic review methodology, using content analysis as the primary analytical tool. Peer-reviewed academic literature, ethical frameworks, and national guidelines—including those from Thailand Science Research and Innovation (TSRI)—were critically examined to identify key themes related to ethical data collection, informed consent, participant protection, and regulatory compliance.

Results: The review identified ๅkey themes: the widespread use of mixed-methods approaches and their ethical implications; the regulatory role of IRBs and RECs; emerging ethical challenges in digital and diverse research contexts; the importance of vulnerability assessments and reflexivity; and the need for translating ethical principles into practical research applications. Additionally, the study highlights TSRI's clarification that anonymous, minimal-risk research in the social sciences and humanities may be exempt from formal ethics committee approval, providing clearer pathways for ethical compliance in locally conducted studies.

Conclusion and Recommendations: Ethical responsibility and methodological rigor are interdependent in research involving human participants. While institutional mechanisms like IRBs are essential, researchers must also engage in continuous ethical reflexivity, especially in digital and cross-cultural environments. The TSRI's exemption policy provides practical clarity for minimal-risk studies in Thailand, reinforcing the importance of balancing ethical safeguards with feasibility. Future research should include empirical studies, comparative ethical analyses, and expanded training in digital and culturally sensitive ethics.

Keywords: *Ethical Research, Human Participants, Behavioral Sciences, Social Sciences*

INTRODUCTION

Research in the behavioral sciences, social sciences, and humanities plays a vital role in deepening our understanding of human behavior, societal dynamics, cultural patterns, and historical contexts. Unlike purely experimental or laboratory-based studies, research in these disciplines often deals with complex, context-dependent phenomena and directly involves human participants. Consequently, the methods used for data collection must be both methodologically sound and ethically responsible. As such, researchers must not only ensure the scientific rigor of their studies but also uphold the principles of human research ethics, including respect for persons, beneficence, justice, informed consent, privacy, and data protection (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Mohajan, 2018; Saikia, 2023; Sánchez et al., 2023). According to Axinn and Pearce (2006), Cambré et al. (2023), and Terrell (2012), data collection in these fields can take many forms—quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods—depending on the research objectives. Quantitative approaches typically involve structured instruments such as surveys and experiments that produce measurable outcomes, while qualitative approaches rely on interviews, focus groups, observations, and case studies to generate rich, descriptive insights. Regardless of the method, the collection of data involving human subjects requires careful planning and the implementation of ethical safeguards throughout the research process. Ethical concerns are particularly significant when dealing with sensitive topics such as mental health, gender identity, political beliefs, or marginalized communities, where the potential for harm, exploitation, or misrepresentation must be diligently addressed (Henrickson et al., 2020; Lazar et al., 2017). In response to these ethical imperatives, institutional review boards (IRBs) or research ethics committees (RECs) have been established globally to oversee and approve research protocols involving human participants. These bodies ensure that studies meet national and international ethical standards, such as those outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, the Belmont Report, and local legislation. They require researchers to demonstrate that participants have been adequately informed about the nature of the study, voluntarily consented to participate, and are protected from undue risk. Ethical research also demands transparency in data handling, secure storage of confidential information, and adherence to protocols that prevent data misuse or unauthorized access (Grady, 2015; Davidson et al., 2024; Du et al., 2024; Findley et al., 2024).

This review article aims to synthesize existing literature on research data collection strategies and ethical frameworks applicable to the behavioral sciences, social sciences, and humanities. It provides an in-depth analysis of primary and secondary data collection methods, evaluates their appropriateness in different research contexts, and explores how each method aligns with ethical principles. By offering a consolidated reference for scholars and research practitioners, this article seeks to promote ethical awareness and methodological rigor across disciplines. In doing so, it reinforces the notion that ethical responsibility and high-quality data collection are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing components of socially meaningful research. As academic institutions increasingly emphasize ethical compliance and responsible research conduct, a comprehensive understanding of both methodological and ethical dimensions is vital to uphold the credibility and societal relevance of scholarly inquiry in these fields.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foundations of Research Data Collection in Human Sciences

The landscape of research data collection in the behavioral sciences, social sciences, and humanities has evolved significantly over the past decades, with increasing emphasis on methodological rigor and ethical responsibility. Bhattacherjee (2012) and Weathington et al. (2010) provide foundational principles for social science research, emphasizing that research methods must be both scientifically sound and ethically grounded. This perspective is reinforced by Mohajan (2018), who argues that qualitative research methodology in social sciences requires particular attention to the complex, context-dependent nature of human phenomena. Furthermore, the methodological approaches to data collection in these fields are diverse and multifaceted. Axinn and Pearce (2006), as well as Tashakkori et al. (2020), pioneered the discussion of mixed-method data collection strategies, demonstrating how researchers can effectively combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain comprehensive insights into human behavior and social phenomena. Terrell (2012) and Tashakkori et al. (2020) add to this discourse by examining mixed-methods research methodologies, highlighting the advantages of triangulating different data sources to enhance the validity and reliability of research findings.

Ethical Frameworks and Human Research Protection

The ethical dimensions of research involving human participants have become increasingly sophisticated and regulated. Grady (2015) and Heimer and Petty (2010) provide a comprehensive analysis of IRBs, examining both their purpose and the challenges they face in protecting research participants while facilitating meaningful scientific inquiry. They emphasize that IRBs serve as crucial gatekeepers in ensuring that research meets established ethical standards and that participants' rights and welfare are adequately protected. Furthermore, contemporary ethical challenges in human research have expanded beyond traditional concerns. Henrickson et al. (2020) and Herington et al. (2023) address the specific ethical considerations involved in research with gender and sexually diverse persons, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive and inclusive research practices. Their work demonstrates how traditional ethical frameworks must be adapted to address the unique vulnerabilities and needs of diverse populations.

Vulnerability and Protection in Research Ethics

The concept of vulnerability in research ethics has received considerable attention in recent literature. Bracken-Roche et al. (2017) and Findley et al. (2024) make a compelling case for the need to assess vulnerability and implement appropriate protections during research design and execution. Vulnerability is not a fixed attribute but rather a contextual condition that may evolve throughout the research process. This perspective challenges researchers to adopt more nuanced and dynamic approaches to participant protection. Moreover, the global and societal implications of research ethics extend beyond individual studies to encompass broader research ecosystems. Du et al. (2024) highlight ethical challenges posed by digital technologies and crowdsourced research. Their analysis suggests that researchers must consider not only the welfare of individual participants but also the broader social consequences of their research practices.

Integration of Ethical Principles and Research Practice

The integration of ethical principles into research practice represents a critical challenge for contemporary researchers. Sánchez et al. (2023) examine research ethics from principles to practical aspects, demonstrating how abstract ethical principles can be translated into concrete research practices. Their work emphasizes that ethical considerations must be embedded throughout the research process, from initial design through data collection, analysis, and dissemination. The literature reveals a consensus that ethical responsibility and methodological rigor are not competing priorities but rather complementary aspects of high-quality research. This perspective suggests that researchers in the behavioral sciences, social sciences, and humanities must develop competencies in both methodological techniques and ethical reasoning to conduct research that is both scientifically valuable and socially responsible.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A systematic review represents a comprehensive and methodologically rigorous approach to synthesizing the latest empirical evidence. By utilizing objective and replicable research procedures, it enhances the reliability and validity of findings. The process involves the systematic analysis of data to extract meaningful insights, evaluate the effectiveness of various interventions or elements, and identify knowledge gaps that require further investigation. Successful implementation of a systematic review demands adherence to established protocols, including the examination of previous reviews for methodological guidance, familiarity with relevant terminology, and the ability to distinguish among different types of systematic reviews (Kolaski et al., 2023; Snyder, 2019). In this review, a qualitative research approach was adopted, encompassing four key stages: research design, data collection, data analysis, and report writing. At the core of this methodology is content analysis—a flexible and widely recognized technique in qualitative systematic reviews—which enables the systematic and objective interpretation of verbal, visual, or textual data to draw valid conclusions about the phenomena under study (Erickson, 2012; Nicmanis, 2024). Accordingly, qualitative content analysis served as the principal analytical method for achieving the stated research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The systematic review uncovered several critical themes pertaining to ethical data collection practices. The results highlight the increasing complexity and necessity of integrating ethical standards into all phases of research, especially when human participants are involved. The review found that mixed-methods approaches are widely adopted, offering the dual advantage of methodological triangulation and deeper insights. However, the ethical alignment of such designs requires careful navigation, particularly in harmonizing informed consent, data security, and participant protection across both qualitative and quantitative domains (Tashakkori et al., 2020; Terrell, 2012). Furthermore, IRBs and RECs play a pivotal role in maintaining ethical rigor. Findings from multiple sources emphasize that these bodies are crucial for upholding principles such as beneficence, justice, and respect for persons (Grady, 2015; Heimer & Petty, 2010). However, inconsistencies in review standards and procedures across institutions may create ethical ambiguities, particularly for cross-cultural or international studies.

A major finding relates to the ethical dilemmas arising from research conducted in digital spaces and with marginalized populations. Studies involving gender and sexually diverse communities, as well as refugee and asylum-seeking populations, reveal that traditional ethical frameworks may be insufficient to address these groups' nuanced vulnerabilities (Henrickson et al., 2020; Davidson et al., 2024). Researchers are thus called to adopt culturally sensitive and inclusive practices to prevent exploitation or misrepresentation. Moreover, the concept of vulnerability emerged as dynamic rather than static. Researchers must continuously assess vulnerability throughout the research process and not merely during initial recruitment (Findley et al., 2024; Bracken-Roche et al., 2017). The findings also stress the importance of embedding ethical principles into practical research workflows. Sánchez et al. (2023) argue that ethical thinking should not be isolated to IRB application stages but must be actively integrated into research execution, data analysis, and dissemination phases. The literature supports a shift from compliance-based ethics to a more engaged, principle-driven approach.

In alignment with the announcement by Thailand Science Research and Innovation (TSRI), research involving human participants in the behavioral sciences, social sciences, and humanities is exempt from ethics committee approval if it does not affect the body, mind, cells, cell components, genetic material, or behavior, and if the research is conducted anonymously—ensuring that participants cannot be identified either directly or indirectly. This includes studies utilizing anonymous questionnaires, interviews, or observations that meet these criteria, as outlined in Guidance No. 3(3) (see Appendix). This clarification helps differentiate between minimal-risk studies and those requiring formal ethics review, allowing researchers to proceed with greater confidence in ethical compliance when appropriate safeguards are in place.

The review demonstrates that ethical and methodological considerations are increasingly interconnected. As human research in the social and behavioral sciences evolves, researchers must not only adhere to formal ethical codes but also internalize ethical reasoning as a foundational component of scholarly integrity. The discussions underscore the growing need for ethics training and institutional support to help researchers navigate complex ethical terrain, particularly in a digitized, globalized research environment. Furthermore, fostering a research culture that values ongoing ethical reflexivity and participant-centered practices can enhance both the validity and societal impact of academic work.

CONCLUSIONS

This review underscores the critical importance of integrating ethical principles into every stage of research involving human participants in the behavioral sciences, social sciences, and humanities. As research methods grow more diverse—ranging from qualitative interviews to mixed-methods designs—so too must the ethical frameworks that guide them. Institutional mechanisms such as IRBs and RECs remain essential in safeguarding participant rights, yet their processes must continue to evolve in response to emerging challenges, including research in digital contexts, cross-cultural considerations, and studies involving vulnerable or marginalized populations. The study highlights that ethical responsibility is not confined to procedural compliance but must be embedded as a core value throughout the research process. Reflexivity,

continuous vulnerability assessment, and transparent data handling practices are essential components of ethical rigor. Furthermore, the clarification provided by TSRI regarding ethics approval exemptions for anonymous, minimal-risk studies offers practical guidance for researchers in Thailand and beyond, emphasizing the need to balance ethical safeguards with academic feasibility. Ultimately, ethical research is not merely about avoiding harm but about promoting trust, respect, and integrity in scholarly inquiry. Researchers must therefore be both methodologically competent and ethically conscious to ensure that their work contributes meaningfully to academic knowledge and societal advancement.

DECLARATION

During the preparation of this work, the authors used AI, specifically ChatGPT and Claude.ai, to check for spelling and grammar errors. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the publication's content.

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APPENDIX

The Guidance on Human Research in the Behavioral Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities by Thailand Science Research and Innovation (TSRI)

สำนักงานคณะกรรมการส่งเสริมวิทยาศาสตร์ วิจัยและนวัตกรรม (สกสว.)
Thailand Science Research and Innovation (TSRI)

สำนักงานการวิจัยแห่งชาติ
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วันที่ 22 มีนาคม พ.ศ. 2564

เรื่อง แนวทางปฏิบัติในการดำเนินการวิจัยในมนุษย์ด้านพฤติกรรมศาสตร์ สังคมศาสตร์และมนุษยศาสตร์

เรียน ผู้อำนวยการสำนักงานการวิจัยแห่งชาติ

สิ่งที่ส่งมาด้วย แนวทางปฏิบัติในการดำเนินการวิจัยในมนุษย์ ด้านพฤติกรรมศาสตร์ สังคมศาสตร์และมนุษยศาสตร์ ฉบับลงวันที่ 18 มีนาคม พ.ศ. 2564

ตามที่คณะกรรมการส่งเสริมวิทยาศาสตร์ วิจัยและนวัตกรรม (กสว.) ในการประชุมครั้งที่ 2/2564 เมื่อวันที่ 19 กุมภาพันธ์ พ.ศ. 2564 ได้พิจารณาเรื่อง แนวทางปฏิบัติในการดำเนินการวิจัยในมนุษย์ ด้านพฤติกรรมศาสตร์ สังคมศาสตร์และมนุษยศาสตร์ และคณะกรรมการฯ ได้มีมติ "เห็นชอบแนวทางปฏิบัติในการดำเนินการวิจัยในมนุษย์ด้านพฤติกรรมศาสตร์ สังคมศาสตร์และมนุษยศาสตร์ โดยขอให้สำนักงานการวิจัยแห่งชาติ (วช.) ดำเนินการต่อไป" นั้น

ในการนี้ สกสว. ฐานะฝ่ายเลขานุการของคณะกรรมการส่งเสริมวิทยาศาสตร์ วิจัยและนวัตกรรม (กสว.) จึงขอนำส่งแนวทางปฏิบัติในการดำเนินการวิจัยในมนุษย์ ด้านพฤติกรรมศาสตร์ สังคมศาสตร์และมนุษยศาสตร์ ซึ่งประธาน กสว. ได้ลงนาม ณ วันที่ 18 มีนาคม พ.ศ. 2564 เรียบร้อยแล้ว ดังเอกสารแนบ

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สร้างสรรค์ปัญญา เพื่อพัฒนาประเทศ

แนวทางปฏิบัติในการดำเนินการวิจัยในมนุษย์ ด้านพฤติกรรมศาสตร์ สังคมศาสตร์และมนุษยศาสตร์

โดยที่คณะกรรมการส่งเสริมวิทยาศาสตร์ วิจัยและนวัตกรรม เห็นสมควรวางแนวทางปฏิบัติในการดำเนินการวิจัยในมนุษย์ด้านพฤติกรรมศาสตร์ สังคมศาสตร์และมนุษยศาสตร์ เพื่อส่งเสริมการวิจัยในด้านดังกล่าวและเพื่อคุ้มครองบุคคลซึ่งเป็นผู้รับการวิจัย

อาศัยอำนาจตามความใน มาตรา 41 (10) แห่งพระราชบัญญัติสภานโยบายการอุดมศึกษา วิทยาศาสตร์ วิจัยและนวัตกรรมแห่งชาติ พ.ศ. 2562 ประกอบวรรคสามของมาตรา 32 และมาตรา 33 (1) แห่งพระราชบัญญัติการส่งเสริมวิทยาศาสตร์ การวิจัยและนวัตกรรม พ.ศ. 2562 คณะกรรมการส่งเสริมวิทยาศาสตร์ วิจัยและนวัตกรรม จึงมีมติเมื่อคราวการประชุมครั้งที่ 2/2564 เมื่อวันที่ 19 กุมภาพันธ์ พ.ศ. 2564 วางแนวทางปฏิบัติในการดำเนินการวิจัยในมนุษย์ด้านพฤติกรรมศาสตร์ สังคมศาสตร์และมนุษยศาสตร์ ไว้ดังต่อไปนี้

ข้อ 1 ในแนวทางนี้

“การวิจัยในมนุษย์” หมายความว่า กระบวนการศึกษาที่ออกแบบอย่างเป็นระบบและหาข้อสรุปในลักษณะที่เป็นความรู้ที่นำไปใช้ได้ทั่วไปในมนุษย์หรือที่เกี่ยวข้องกับมนุษย์ โดยกระทำต่อร่างกาย จิตใจ เซลล์ ส่วนประกอบของเซลล์ สารพันธุกรรม สิ่งส่งตรวจ เนื้อเยื่อ สารคัดหลั่ง และจากข้อมูลที่บันทึกในเวชระเบียนหรือข้อมูล ด้านสุขภาพของผู้รับการวิจัย เพื่อให้ได้มาซึ่งความรู้ด้านชีวเวชศาสตร์ ด้านการสาธารณสุข ด้านวิทยาศาสตร์สุขภาพ หรือด้านพฤติกรรมศาสตร์ สังคมศาสตร์หรือมนุษยศาสตร์ บรรดาที่เกี่ยวข้องกับสุขภาพ และให้หมายความรวมถึงการวิจัยที่เกี่ยวข้องกับผู้ที่เสียชีวิตแล้วด้วย แต่ทั้งนี้ไม่รวมถึงการสอบสวนโรคโดยผู้ประกอบวิชาชีพเวชกรรม ด้านการแพทย์ การสาธารณสุข และการวิจัยที่ได้รับการยกเว้นตามแนวทางนี้

“ความเปราะบาง” หมายความว่า ภาวะของบุคคลซึ่งอาจถูกชักจูงให้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยในมนุษย์ได้โดยง่าย ด้วยความหวังว่าจะได้รับประโยชน์จากการเข้าร่วมการวิจัยไม่ว่าจะสมเหตุสมผลหรือไม่ก็ตาม หรืออาจตอบตกลงเข้าร่วมการวิจัยในมนุษย์เพราะเกรงกลัวว่าจะถูกกลั่นแกล้งจากผู้มีอำนาจเหนือกว่าหากปฏิเสธ หรือไม่สามารถตัดสินใจ เลือก หรือแสดงออกได้โดยอิสระ หรือไม่สามารถปกป้องตนเองได้อย่างเต็มที่ หรือไม่สามารถให้ความยินยอมด้วยตนเองได้โดยอิสระ

“ผู้รับการวิจัย” หมายความว่า บุคคลซึ่งสมัครใจหรือยินยอมเข้ารับการวิจัยในมนุษย์ และให้หมายความรวมถึงผู้ที่เสียชีวิตแล้วด้วย

“ผู้วิจัย” หมายความว่า บุคคลหรือคณะบุคคลซึ่งทำการวิจัยในมนุษย์

“ผู้จัดให้มีการวิจัย” หมายความว่า บุคคล คณะบุคคล หรือองค์กรซึ่งเป็นผู้ริเริ่มจัดการหรือให้ทุนสนับสนุนโครงการวิจัยในมนุษย์

“สถาบัน” หมายความว่า หน่วยงานหรือองค์กรที่ดำเนินการโครงการวิจัยในมนุษย์

ข้อ 2 โครงการวิจัยในมนุษย์ด้านพฤติกรรมศาสตร์ สังคมศาสตร์และมนุษยศาสตร์ต้องได้รับความเห็นชอบจากคณะกรรมการจริยธรรมการวิจัยในมนุษย์ของสถาบัน โดยเฉพาะโครงการต่อไปนี้

(1) โครงการวิจัยที่กระทำต่อมนุษย์ไม่ว่ากระทำต่อร่างกาย จิตใจ เซลล์ ส่วนประกอบของเซลล์ สารพันธุกรรม สิ่งส่งตรวจ เนื้อเยื่อ หรือสารคัดหลั่งของบุคคล

(2) โครงการทดลองทางพฤติกรรมศาสตร์ จิตวิทยา หรือศาสตร์อื่นเพื่อสังเกตพฤติกรรมของผู้รับการวิจัย แต่มิให้หมายความรวมถึงการสังเกตพฤติกรรมในชุมชนหรือในสังคมเป็นการทั่วไปโดยวิธีการเก็บข้อมูลนั้นไม่สามารถระบุตัวบุคคลได้ไม่ว่าทางตรงหรือทางอ้อม

(3) โครงการวิจัยข้อมูลที่บันทึกในเวชระเบียน หรือข้อมูลด้านสุขภาพเกี่ยวกับบุคคลซึ่งสามารถระบุตัวบุคคลนั้นได้ไม่ว่าทางตรงหรือทางอ้อม

(4) โครงการวิจัยที่ทำในผู้รับการวิจัยที่มีความเปราะบางหรือเป็นผู้เยาว์ที่มีอายุต่ำกว่าสิบแปดปีบริบูรณ์

(5) โครงการวิจัยที่ศึกษาการบังคับใช้กฎหมายหากข้อมูลรั่วไหลผู้รับการวิจัยอาจถูกดำเนินคดีตามกฎหมาย

(6) โครงการวิจัยที่อาจมีผลกระทบต่อชื่อเสียงของผู้รับการวิจัย

(7) โครงการวิจัยที่อาจส่งผลให้ผู้รับการวิจัยถูกเลิกจ้าง เสียสิทธิหรือผลประโยชน์บางประการหรือกระทบต่อสถานภาพการเงินหรือสถานภาพทางสังคมหรือครอบครัวของผู้รับการวิจัย

(8) โครงการวิจัยอื่นที่ กสว. ประกาศกำหนด

ข้อ 3 โครงการวิจัยในมนุษย์ด้านพฤติกรรมศาสตร์ สังคมศาสตร์และมนุษยศาสตร์ที่ไม่ต้องขอรับความเห็นชอบจากคณะกรรมการจริยธรรมการวิจัยในมนุษย์ของสถาบัน ได้แก่

(1) โครงการวิจัยซึ่ง**มิได้กระทำต่อ**ร่างกาย จิตใจ เซลล์ ส่วนประกอบของเซลล์ สารพันธุกรรม สิ่งส่งตรวจ เนื้อเยื่อ สารคัดหลั่งของบุคคล

(2) โครงการวิจัยข้อมูลที่บันทึกในเวชระเบียนหรือข้อมูลด้านสุขภาพของผู้รับการวิจัย บรรดาซึ่งเป็น**ข้อมูลที่ไม่สามารถระบุตัวบุคคลได้**ไม่ว่าทางตรงหรือทางอ้อม

(3) โครงการวิจัยที่ออกแบบสอบถาม สัมภาษณ์หรือสังเกตผู้รับการวิจัยซึ่ง**มิได้กระทำต่อหรือมีผลต่อ**ร่างกาย จิตใจ เซลล์ ส่วนประกอบของเซลล์ สารพันธุกรรม สิ่งส่งตรวจ เนื้อเยื่อ สารคัดหลั่ง สุขภาพหรือพฤติกรรม ทั้งนี้ ซึ่งไม่สามารถระบุตัวบุคคลได้ไม่ว่าทางตรงหรือทางอ้อม

(4) โครงการวิจัยเกี่ยวกับการทดสอบคุณภาพ รสชาติอาหาร หรือการยอมรับของผู้บริโภคหากอาหารนั้นไม่มีสิ่งเจือปนของสารปรุงแต่งที่ไม่ได้รับการรับรองตามกฎหมายหรืออาหารนั้นไม่มีสารอันตรายเกินระดับความปลอดภัยตามเกณฑ์ของสำนักงานคณะกรรมการอาหารและยา

(5) โครงการวิจัยซึ่งมีการสังเกตพฤติกรรมในชุมชนหรือในสังคมเป็นการทั่วไปโดยวิธีการเก็บข้อมูลนั้นไม่สามารถระบุตัวบุคคลได้ไม่ว่าทางตรงหรือทางอ้อม

(6) โครงการวิจัยที่เกี่ยวกับกระบวนการเรียนการสอนหรือการประเมินผลการเรียนการสอนซึ่งไม่สามารถระบุตัวบุคคลได้ไม่ว่าทางตรงหรือทางอ้อม

(7) โครงการวิจัยอื่นที่ กสว. ประกาศกำหนด

ข้อ 4 การวิจัยที่กระทำในบุคคลที่มีความเปราะบางหรือผู้เยาว์ที่มีอายุมีอายุต่ำกว่าสิบแปดปีบริบูรณ์ ต้องขอความยินยอมจากผู้แทนโดยชอบธรรม ผู้อนุบาลหรือผู้พิทักษ์ของผู้นั้นตามกฎหมายและตามหลักเกณฑ์ที่ กสว. ประกาศกำหนด

ข้อ 5 การวิจัยที่กระทำเกี่ยวกับผู้เสียชีวิตจะต้องได้รับความยินยอมจากผู้จัดการมรดกหรือทายาท และห้ามมิให้กระทำการวิจัยดังกล่าวหากขัดกับเจตนาที่ได้ทำเป็นหนังสือของผู้เสียชีวิตนั้น

ข้อ 6 การวิจัยในมนุษย์ตามแนวทางนี้ต้องดำเนินการให้ชอบด้วยกฎหมายว่าด้วยการคุ้มครองข้อมูลส่วนบุคคล กฎหมายว่าด้วยข้อมูลข่าวสารของราชการและกฎหมายอื่น

ข้อ 7 ให้ผู้อำนวยการสำนักงานการวิจัยแห่งชาติเป็นผู้รักษาการตามแนวทางนี้

ในกรณีที่มีปัญหาในการปฏิบัติตามแนวทางนี้หรือมีปัญหาเกี่ยวกับการตีความแนวทางนี้ ให้ผู้อำนวยการตามวรรคหนึ่งเสนอ กสว. พิจารณาวินิจฉัย คำวินิจฉัยของ กสว. ให้เป็นที่สุด

ในกรณีที่มีความจำเป็นอย่างยิ่งเพื่อประโยชน์สาธารณะ กสว. อาจมีมติด้วยคะแนนเสียงไม่น้อยกว่าสองในสามของจำนวนกรรมการทั้งหมดเท่าที่มีอยู่ ให้งดใช้แนวทางนี้ได้

ประกาศ ณ วันที่ 18 มีนาคม พ.ศ. 2564

(ศาสตราจารย์กิตติคุณ นพ.สุทธิพร จิตต์มิตรภาพ)
ประธานกรรมการส่งเสริมวิทยาศาสตร์ วิจัยและนวัตกรรม

Digital Transformation of Grocery Stores in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to explore the digital transformation of grocery stores in Thailand, focusing on how technological adoption, operational changes, and evolving consumer expectations are reshaping the retail landscape.

Methods: A qualitative research design was employed, combining in-depth interviews with ten grocery store owners and managers who have implemented digital initiatives, alongside a documentary method to analyse relevant secondary sources. Purposive sampling ensured participants were directly involved in digital transformation processes. Content analysis was used to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships within the collected data.

Results: Digital transformation in grocery retail is driven by changing consumer demands, competitive market pressures, and the need for operational efficiency. Grocery stores are adopting various digital tools, including e-commerce platforms, social media marketing, and cloud-based inventory systems, often supported by partnerships with third-party delivery services. Benefits include improved inventory management, enhanced customer engagement, and more efficient workflows. However, challenges such as high implementation costs, limited digital skills among staff, and cybersecurity concerns persist, particularly for smaller operators.

Conclusion: Digital transformation in grocery retail is an ongoing process requiring a balanced approach that integrates technology adoption with workforce development and customer-centric strategies. Retailers should implement scalable digital solutions, invest in continuous staff training, leverage customer data for personalisation, strengthen community connections, and adopt robust cybersecurity measures. These strategies can enhance competitiveness, foster customer loyalty, and ensure sustainable growth in the evolving digital economy.

Keywords: *Digital Transformation, Grocery Retail, Technology Adoption*

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, the intersection of technological innovation and globalization has accelerated the transformation of economic structures, reshaping industries and redefining consumer engagement. The rapid expansion of the digital world economy is profoundly transforming lifestyles and consumer behaviour on a global scale, leading to ongoing shifts in market dynamics and economic theory. One of the most significant developments is the dramatic increase in consumer choice, as purchasing options have become more diverse and accessible. The proliferation of convenience stores exemplifies this transformation, offering consumers multiple points of purchase across various locations. However, despite these advancements, certain unethical business practices—reminiscent of traditional monopolistic structures—persist within the marketplace (Gillpatrick, 2019; Jung et al., 2023; Limna et al., 2023; Petricevic & Teece, 2019; Suntsova, 2024). The retail industry is experiencing a pronounced digital transformation, characterised by the integration of physical outlets with online sales platforms. Modern consumers increasingly expect flexible shopping experiences that allow them to purchase, receive, and return products at their convenience, supported by high product availability and real-time information updates. These shifts have been observable since the early 2000s across multiple retail sectors. Within the retail landscape, convenience stores and grocery stores remain essential formats for distributing food and household products. Grocery stores typically offer a combination of fresh and packaged foods, along with non-food essentials such as paper goods, cleaning products, over-the-counter medications, and personal care items. Many also provide fresh produce, meats, dairy products, and bakery goods. Unlike other retail segments, the grocery industry has been comparatively slow to embrace digital channels, with significant online growth emerging only recently in response to rising demand for omni-channel experiences. At the same time, the growing prominence of convenience stores highlights broader concerns about the influence of large corporations on local economies, communities, and consumer choice. Advocates for localisation argue that independent stores are more beneficial for local societies and economies compared to national or corporate chains (Eriksson et al., 2019; Nilsson et al., 2014; Rybaczewska & Sparks, 2020; Stecuła et al., 2024; Tolstoy et al., 2021; Wrigley et al., 2018). The adaptation of grocery stores to the digital economy represents a critical area of study. This qualitative study aims to explain the digital transformation of grocery stores in the digital era. Understanding how these businesses navigate technological transformation can provide valuable insights for enhancing operational performance, improving customer satisfaction, and fostering loyalty. Ultimately, successful adaptation strategies have the potential to strengthen both business outcomes and long-term competitiveness in the digital economy.

RELATED LITERATURE

Abbu et al. (2021) highlight that while digital transformation holds significant potential for economic gains, few businesses have achieved it successfully. In the grocery sector, however, shifting consumer attitudes and behaviors, rapid technological advancements, heightened competitive pressures, and narrow profit margins—further intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic—are accelerating this transformation. Both traditional brick-and-mortar retailers and e-commerce platforms, alongside emerging start-ups, are investing heavily in the digital grocery ecosystem, encompassing online shopping experiences, automated order picking, delivery systems, and digital supply chain innovations. These investments are strategically aligned with goals of enhancing customer loyalty, increasing revenue, and boosting profitability. Using inductive methods, the study identifies key drivers and technologies shaping the digital grocery business and introduces a conceptual model of the digital grocery ecosystem to deepen understanding of how digital transformation is unfolding within the industry.

Dakora and Rambe (2022) examine how South African food and grocery retailers adopted digital technologies and innovative practices during the COVID-19 pandemic to sustain operations, engage customers, and ensure safety for both staff and shoppers. Under one of the world's strictest national lockdowns in 2020, these retailers—among the few permitted to operate—rapidly implemented technology-driven solutions such as mobile applications, click-and-collect services, and other digital innovations to boost sales while adhering to health protocols. These measures contributed to a national surge in online sales of over 50% during the year. By analyzing the 2020 annual reports of major retailers, the study highlights a pandemic-led disruption of the sector and underscores how the accelerated adoption of digital technologies is steering the industry toward long-term digital transformation. Such investments position South African retailers to compete effectively in the post-pandemic retail landscape while offering enhanced shopping options for consumers.

Sodsup and Sirisopana (2023) examined the challenges faced by convenience stores amid increasing competition, technological transformation, and shifts in consumer behavior driven by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting new normal lifestyles. The study aimed to identify factors influencing the survival of convenience stores in this changing environment. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected via questionnaires from 400 convenience store employees in Bangkok through convenience sampling. Analysis methods included frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and multiple regression. Findings indicated that employees rated transformational leadership highly, while digital transformation, knowledge management, and survival in response to new normal lifestyles were rated at the highest level. Hypothesis testing revealed that transformational leadership ($\beta = .280$), digital transformation ($\beta = .408$), and knowledge management ($\beta = .471$) significantly influenced convenience store survival at the 0.01 level. The regression model explained 71.7% of the variance in survival outcomes, demonstrating the strong combined impact of these factors in helping convenience stores adapt and endure in the evolving business landscape.

Yodpram (2024) investigated how consumer behavior, perception, and attitudes toward online grocery shopping shifted globally due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a specific focus on Thailand. Recognizing the growing importance of social media reviews, which consumers often trusted as authentic reflections of real experiences, the study examined how these reviews influenced purchase decisions in the online grocery sector. Using data collected from 288 respondents with online shopping experience, the research employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the causal relationships among social media reviews, brand reputation, brand association, and purchasing decisions. The findings revealed that social media reviews significantly and positively affected both brand reputation and brand association, which in turn influenced consumers' purchasing behavior. Additionally, the study confirmed both direct and indirect effects within the proposed framework, offering valuable managerial insights for online store owners and platform developers aiming to enhance consumer engagement and drive sales through strategic use of social media feedback.

Wolniak et al. (2024) highlighted the revolution in grocery shopping from a technological perspective, presented the most significant digital achievements, and outlined the future possibilities for further advancements in this field. The future of in-store grocery shopping is set to be transformed by the integration of advanced digital technologies that enhance convenience, personalization, and efficiency, creating smart, interconnected environments where physical and digital experiences converge. Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning will drive hyper-personalized shopping through sophisticated customer analytics, offering tailored recommendations and promotions based on purchasing history, preferences, and in-store behavior. Automation, including autonomous checkout systems powered by AI and computer vision, will facilitate frictionless transactions, while augmented reality (AR) will overlay interactive product information, promotions, and navigation tools to enrich the shopping journey. The Internet of Things (IoT) will optimize inventory management through smart shelves and dynamic pricing, and blockchain will enable transparent, sustainable supply chains, empowering eco-conscious purchasing decisions. Analyzed through the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), these innovations' adoption is strongly influenced by perceived usefulness—such as time savings, improved decision-making, and streamlined processes—and perceived ease of use, which can be hindered by technological complexity or user proficiency gaps. Consumer attitudes play a pivotal role in behavioral intentions, with successful examples like Scan&Go illustrating that when shoppers find technologies both valuable and easy to use, adoption and long-term integration into shopping habits significantly increase.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present qualitative study aims to explain the digital transformation of grocery stores in the digital era. To achieve this, a comprehensive qualitative research methodology was employed, with a strategic focus on in-depth interviews to obtain rich, detailed, and contextually grounded data. This methodological approach is particularly suited to uncovering the underlying motivations, contextual influences, and nuanced factors shaping the behaviours and decision-making processes of individuals or groups. Emphasising the value of dynamic researcher–participant interaction, in-depth interviews facilitated the collection of multifaceted insights, consistent with established qualitative research practices in this field. To enhance the

depth and breadth of findings in relation to the study's objectives, the research also incorporated the documentary method alongside interviews to gather primary data. This involved a systematic and critical review of relevant secondary sources, which informed the precise formulation of interview questions and ensured their direct alignment with the research focus.

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to select participants based on their relevance and potential contribution to addressing the research questions. The sample consisted of 10 grocery store owners and managers in Thailand, each aged over 18, who have actively engaged with digital transformation initiatives within their operations. This demographic was chosen to provide practical insights into how grocery stores are adopting and integrating digital technologies in the regional business context, thereby enhancing the study's empirical relevance. For data analysis, content analysis was employed to systematically examine and categorise the qualitative data derived from interviews, conducted both virtually and in person. This analytical approach enabled the objective identification of recurring themes, constructs, and patterns within the data, facilitating empirically grounded inferences about the processes and drivers of digital transformation in the grocery retail sector. Through this multi-method qualitative approach, the study aims to advance scholarly understanding of how grocery stores adapt to and navigate the challenges and opportunities of the digital economy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings from the in-depth interviews and documentary analysis reveal a multi-dimensional picture of how grocery stores in Thailand are undergoing digital transformation in response to technological advancements, shifting consumer behaviours, and competitive pressures. The analysis generated several interrelated themes: drivers of transformation, technological adoption patterns, operational impacts, customer engagement strategies, and challenges and barriers.

Figure 1. Word Cloud (Source: Authors via Simplewordcloud.com)

Participants consistently highlighted that the primary catalysts for adopting digital technologies were changing consumer expectations, competitive market dynamics, and operational efficiency needs. Customers increasingly demand seamless omni-channel experiences—where physical and digital touchpoints integrate to allow purchasing, delivery, and returns with minimal friction. Respondents also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated the transition, pushing even small-scale operators to invest in online platforms, delivery services, and cashless payment systems. This aligns with Dakora and Rambe's (2022) findings that external shocks can trigger rapid innovation adoption. Furthermore, the majority of interviewed grocery store owners and managers reported embracing a combination of e-commerce platforms, point-of-sale (POS) digitisation, and social media marketing. Many stores partnered with third-party delivery services such as GrabMart and Foodpanda to extend market reach without incurring large infrastructure costs. Inventory management systems with barcode scanning were introduced to improve stock control and reduce losses from expiry or shrinkage. Some larger operators experimented with AI-powered recommendation tools and customer loyalty applications, echoing Limna et al. (2023), Limna et al. (2024), and Wolniak et al. (2024)'s predictions of AI and automation as transformative forces in retail.

Digitalization has reshaped internal operations by streamlining workflows, improving supply chain coordination, and enabling data-driven decision-making. Respondents noted that real-time inventory visibility helped prevent stockouts, while automated sales reporting simplified performance tracking. Additionally, digital tools reduced dependency on manual record-keeping, freeing up staff time for customer service. However, the transition required significant initial investment in equipment, training, and system integration. Interviewees described social media platforms—especially Facebook, Line Official Accounts, and TikTok—as powerful tools for fostering customer loyalty and driving sales. Consistent with Asanprakit and Limna (2023) and Yodpram's (2024) findings, user-generated content and positive reviews were seen as critical in shaping brand reputation and influencing purchasing decisions. Some stores offered personalized promotions based on past purchase history, while others used livestreaming to showcase products and interact directly with customers in real time. This shift reflects a broader trend toward experience-driven retail, where digital tools are not just transactional but relational.

Despite clear benefits, several obstacles hinder full-scale digital adoption. Commonly cited issues included high implementation costs, limited digital skills among staff, and resistance to change from long-standing employees. Smaller operators faced additional difficulties in negotiating competitive delivery fees and achieving online visibility against larger chains with greater marketing budgets. Concerns over cybersecurity risks and data privacy were also prevalent, underscoring the need for stronger governance and staff training in digital safety practices. The evidence suggests that successful digital transformation in the grocery sector requires a balanced strategy—combining technological innovation with workforce development and customer-centric practices. The adoption of scalable, modular digital solutions allows small and medium-sized stores to remain competitive without overextending resources. Furthermore, leveraging local community connections can differentiate independent stores from corporate chains, aligning with Rybaczewska and Sparks' (2020) view that locally-owned outlets can thrive by embedding themselves within community networks.

Overall, the results underscore that digital transformation in grocery retail is not a one-time project but an evolving process, influenced by consumer behaviour, market conditions, and technological innovation. The integration of physical and digital retail channels, supported by adaptive leadership and community-oriented strategies, appears to be the most sustainable pathway forward in Thailand's dynamic retail landscape.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the digital transformation of grocery stores in Thailand, revealing how technological adoption, operational restructuring, and shifting consumer expectations are redefining the retail landscape. The findings indicate that digitalisation is driving the integration of online and offline channels, optimising internal processes, and enhancing customer engagement through personalised, data-driven, and interactive marketing strategies. While larger chains possess greater resources to implement advanced systems, small and medium-sized grocery stores are increasingly adopting scalable, cost-effective solutions—such as social media marketing, partnerships with third-party delivery services, and cloud-based inventory management—to remain competitive. The results underscore that successful digital transformation relies not only on technological investment but also on adaptive leadership, employee digital literacy, and a deep understanding of local market dynamics.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the retail transformation literature by applying the TAM to the grocery sector, illustrating how perceived usefulness and ease of use shape technology adoption decisions. Practically, it offers actionable insights for grocery retailers, recommending a phased approach to technology integration that aligns with business capacity, continuous staff training to enhance digital competencies, and the use of customer data to personalise services and strengthen loyalty. Independent grocery stores, in particular, can leverage community engagement as a unique competitive advantage, while all retailers should prioritise cybersecurity measures to safeguard payment systems and protect customer data.

However, the research has certain limitations. The qualitative sample consisted of ten participants from Thailand, which may limit the generalisability of the results, and the perspectives gathered were confined to store owners and managers, excluding input from customers, technology providers, and supply chain partners. Future research should address these gaps by conducting comparative cross-country studies, incorporating quantitative methods to test the relationships identified here, and including customer perspectives to better understand satisfaction, trust, and loyalty in digital grocery shopping. Moreover, examining the long-term sustainability implications of digitalisation—such as supply chain transparency, environmental impact, and ethical retail practices—would enrich the understanding of its broader effects.

DECLARATION

During the preparation of this work, the authors used AI, specifically ChatGPT and Claude.ai, to check for spelling and grammar errors. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the publication's content.

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Implementation of Task-based Language Teaching in Chinese Universities

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has gained international recognition as an effective approach to second language acquisition, emphasizing real-world tasks and interactive learning. Despite its endorsement in Chinese university English curricula, challenges persist regarding its practical implementation, particularly from the learners' perspectives. This study aimed to examine the extent of TBLT implementation in Chinese universities, focusing on learners' perceptions of tasks, grouping and cooperative learning, and co-assessment. Additionally, it examined differences in perceptions based on demographic factors, including gender, age, and language proficiency.

Method: A descriptive quantitative research design was employed, surveying 393 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners from three universities in Zhejiang Province based on stratified sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS to determine trends and significant differences in responses.

Results: The findings revealed that learners generally had positive perceptions of TBLT, particularly regarding tasks, which they found beneficial for developing their language skills and for their future careers. However, cooperative learning and assessment methods presented challenges, with some students exhibiting anxiety in group interactions and oral presentations. Notably, significant differences were found in TBLT implementation based on gender and age, with male and younger learners showing higher engagement.

Conclusion: The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on TBLT by highlighting the need for tailored instructional strategies in Chinese university EFL contexts. It recommends enhancing teacher training programs to better integrate cooperative learning and assessment methods, ensuring a smoother transition to TBLT-based pedagogy.

Keywords: *Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, cooperative learning, co-assessment, Chinese universities*

1. INTRODUCTION

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a teaching method that advocates "learning by doing", and it has attracted many benefits from previous teaching method, so it has enjoyed growing popularity globally in second language acquisition (SLA) research (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003; Ellis et al, 2020; Richards & Rodgers, 2014) in recent decades. However, controversies still exist concerning some nuances of the three variables in the current study, which focuses on the implementation of TBLT, with no consensus reached, especially in the context of EFL classrooms in Chinese tertiary settings. Therefore, the development of TBLT in China is not yet mature, and a systematic investigation is needed; this issue is also what the current study aims to address.

The origin of the concept of TBLT can be traced back to Prabhu (1987)'s Communicative Language Teaching Project when he used to work with primary and secondary classes in Bangalore in Southern India in the year of 1987, and in these classes in his project, the focus was mainly put on "what was said in class" instead of "how it was said" (Hall, 2011). The purpose and nature of TBLT have manifested themselves in Ellis (2003): "Task-based language teaching is an approach to teaching a second/foreign language that seeks to facilitate language learning by engaging learners in the interactionally authentic language use that results from performing a series of tasks' (Ellis, 2003).

In terms of TBLT processes, several scholars have conducted extensive research in this field. For example, Prabhu (1987), one of the first educators to introduce TBLT, proposed a model consisting of three stages: "pre-task (preparatory)", "task (meaning-focused, interactive process)", and "post-task (discussion-attending to form)".

Later, Willis (1996) outlines a framework for TBLT as an extension to Prabhu's (1987) model. According to Willis' framework for TBLT implementation, tasks are organized in the following

three stages: “pre-task”, “task cycle”, and “language focus” (Willis, 1996, p. 40). In this new model, Wills (1996) addresses the components of the TBLT framework in a more precise manner than in the original model.

For Willis (1996), the “pre-task,” as the first stage of the TBLT procedure, is often considered the introduction to the topic and task. At this stage, the teachers would explore the topic with their students through warm-up activities or via a lead-in. In particular, teachers will teach some useful words and expressions, so that students will develop a clearer understanding of the task instructions that follow. Therefore, at this first stage of the “task”, students have access to extensive language input. Then, the following stage, the “task cycle”, puts emphasis on fluency and meaning. During the “task cycle”, students use the target language to attain the task’s goals. More specifically, the “task cycle” is subdivided into three sections: “task”, “planning”, and “report”. In the “task” phrase, students would work in pairs or small groups to accomplish the task. During this phase, the teachers would monitor the class from a distance. In the “planning” phase, students would plan to report to the whole class about how they finished the task and what they had discovered in the process. When students prepare their reports, they are required to decide the best way to deliver this information, either orally or in writing. In the “report” phase, students would present their reports, either via an exchange of written reports with other students or in front of the class, so as to compare the results. Regarding the “language focus” stage, it encompasses “analysis” and “practice”, where students examine and discuss specific features related to the recording or reading of the text. During this stage, teachers conduct specific language exercises based on the task to help students accurately acquire these linguistic patterns.

Recent years have also seen the growing popularity of TBLT in the EFL contexts of East Asia (Nunan, 2004), where it has emerged as a new orthodoxy in English Language Teaching (ELT). In a similar vein, Littlewood (2007) also states that TBLT has been addressed in national policies and syllabuses enacted by East Asian educators and governments at the highest level over the past two decades. The reasons for this movement are primarily attributed to the urgent need to increase the number of people who can use English effectively for communication in this area.

Regarding the development of TBLT in Mainland China, it has undergone gradual development over the past few decades. The relevant background is detailed as follows. English has been considered a compulsory subject in university curricula for years, and English teaching methods in ELT classrooms of Chinese universities have undergone three shifts: traditional grammar-translation methods, audiolingual methods, and communicative language teaching (CLT) (Wang & Lam, 2010; Wang, 2007). This is also verified predominantly in the last decade, where significant reforms of the National English Curriculum have been implemented (Chen, 2008).

According to the Ministry of Education in China (2001), the current imbalance in English education is highlighted in light of the country's economic and social development. To address this issue, various efforts have been made since 2001 to rectify the situation through the implementation of reforms to the English curriculum nationwide. These reforms have required the facilitation of implementing TBLT in the context of Chinese EFL settings. In 2001, the National English Curriculum Standard (NECS) was revised by the Ministry of Education (MOE), and TBLT was strongly advocated as "the latest methodological realization of communicative pedagogy", which has become a cornerstone of this new curriculum in Chinese EFL classrooms (Hu, 2013). Following this trend, a wide scope of TBLT textbooks has been published for the Chinese local market. Against this background, it is highly recommended that Chinese EFL teachers implement TBLT due to the perceived benefits of TBLT for both teachers and learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Ellis, 2003).

Despite the aforementioned popularity of TBLT in recent years, several concerns related to its implementation in the ELT classrooms of Mainland China exist. For example, despite the newly reformed curriculum's strong recommendation of TBLT for university EFL teaching in China, several educators and teachers have questioned its suitability (Wen, 2004; Pei, 2009). These scholars point out that teachers often lack professional training in implementing TBLT in classrooms; therefore, a large number of teachers fail to correctly understand the concepts related to TBLT (Chen, 2008), such as the concept of task (Feng, 2011). As a result, effective implementation of TBLT in Chinese universities encounters numerous obstacles. In other words, TBLT still faces diverse challenges and a series of problems when implemented in Chinese universities, with several issues still requiring attention. Furthermore, in Chinese tertiary educational settings, where EFL teaching and assessment methods are largely dictated by the examination system, teachers and learners tend to adopt a more traditional approach, which favors paper-and-pencil tests within a framework of grammar-directed instruction that primarily originates from structure-focused curricula (Mann, 2006).

The rationales for this study are twofold. For one aspect, a systematic study on the implementation of TBLT in Chinese universities is urgently needed, given the previous background information on TBLT in EFL teaching in Chinese universities. In this way, the study would help clear the obstacles and confusion in TBLT teaching in Chinese universities. Furthermore, this systematic study on TBLT is highly needed as guidance for Chinese university EFL teachers, textbook compilers, and university department leaders to collaborate and provide sufficient support, ensuring the successful implementation of TBLT in EFL classrooms in Chinese universities. In the long run, it will help reform EFL teaching resources and paradigms in Chinese universities.

This study has some significance. It is hoped that this study would shed some insights to EFL teachers and learners in Chinese high education settings, so that a multi-dimensional picture of Chinese EFL learners' perceptions towards TBLT implementation will be built, and based on this, Chinese EFL teachers can take corresponding matters in their designing effective TBLT teaching plans and eventually will be more confident in applying TBLT in their TBLT implementation in class. In particular, the output gained from this study would greatly benefit EFL teachers, students, as well as department leaders in their policy making and teaching arrangement, and it would also inspire EFL textbook compilers, based on TBLT teaching, to take more pertinent actions in designing appropriate and effective textbook resources for EFL learners.

In general, this study aims to investigate the implementation of this approach in Chinese universities from the learners' perspectives. More specifically, the purposes of the study are as follows: to identify the level of implementation of TBLT in terms of learners' perceptions of tasks, perceptions on grouping and cooperative learning and perceptions on co-assessment; to test the difference of responses on implementation when grouped according to different profiles of groups (such as age, gender and language proficiency level); and to propose a program and some suggestions for teacher training on TBLT in the Chinese university context based on the previous results and analysis.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Implementation of TBLT and EFL learners

Some scholars have identified various types of tasks that offer students a range of learning opportunities, thereby helping them achieve learning outcomes within the language classroom. Prabhu (1987, pp. 46-47) offers three types of tasks: an "information-gap activity", a "reasoning-gap activity", and an "opinion-gap activity". In the context of TBLT, an "information-gap activity" is typically a pair work activity concerning the transfer of a given piece of information from one learner to another. For instance, when learners are required to work in pairs, one student has information that the other does not, and vice versa. The learners need to decode or encode the information so that they can fill in the gap(s). The second type of task, a "reasoning-gap activity", is associated with the elicitation of new information through deduction. The third type of task, an 'opinion-gap activity', involves formulating arguments or expressing personal preferences, attitudes, or feelings based on a given situation (e.g., discussing a social issue).

In contrast, Pattison (1987) categorizes tasks into seven categories: "questions and answers", "dialogues and role plays", "matching activities", "communication strategies", "pictures and

picture stories", "puzzles and problems", and "discussions and decisions". Subsequently, Willis (1996, p. 26) set out six types of tasks: "listing", "ordering and sorting", "comparing", "problem solving", "sharing personal experiences", and "creative tasks". Moreover, Richards (2001, p. 162) builds upon the results of previous research and proposes five types of tasks: "jigsaw tasks", "information-gap tasks", "problem-solving tasks", "decision-making tasks", and "opinion exchange tasks".

In this line of research, numerous studies have focused on teachers' perceptions of TBLT implementation in the global context of EFL teaching in universities. (Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Cheng & Moses, 2011; Zheng & Borg, 2014; Douglas & Kim, 2014; Xhaferi & Xhafer, 2013; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007). Both positive comments and concerns regarding TBLT have been noted. For instance, the researchers have verified that learners' improved academic skills and increased independence in their learning have occurred after the implementation of TBLT. They also emphasize concerns about assessing learners' performance and the instructional materials to be covered in their EFL classrooms when TBLT principles are balanced with local needs. Other scholars have identified similar concerns about TBLT, particularly in light of the specific challenges faced by EFL practitioners in an international context (Wills & Wills, 2007; van den Branden et al., 2009).

There are also studies on learners' perceptions of TBLT. For example, Hadi (2013) investigates the perception of TBLT by Iranian EFL learners. The study, which utilized a questionnaire, involved 88 EFL learners as participants. The results showed a high level of understanding of TBLT concepts among the participants, with a few negative views on the implementation of TBLT. Moreover, Sahrawi (2017) investigated students' perception of TBLT in a listening class at IKIP-PGRI Ponitianak, with one teacher and twelve students participating in the study. Through an analysis of data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation, the study suggested that students believed TBLT helped them in the listening class. These studies have laid a solid foundation for the current study. However, few studies have been conducted on the perceptions of Chinese university EFL learners regarding the implementation of TBLT, which presents a gap in the existing research.

One of the themes emerging from learners' understanding of TBLT implementation concerns the relationship between TBLT and assessment modes. It is evident that recent years have witnessed the growing popularity of TBLT and language assessment (Chen & Wang, 2019, p. 119). Van den Branden (2006) and Norris (2009) have proposed that task-based language assessment constitutes a key aspect in TBLT. Therefore, TBLT is inseparable from a consistent assessment or feedback system.

As one of the challenges to successful task-based instruction, assessing task-based performance differs significantly from traditional formative examinations in that it involves observing real-world acts or engaging in a real-life activity within a pedagogical setting. Just as Ellis (2003, p. 279) states, "task-based testing is seen as a way of achieving a close correlation between the test performance, i.e. what the testee does during the test, and the criterion of performance, i.e. what the testee has to do in the real world." Assessment tasks are thus viewed as "devices for eliciting and evaluating communicative performances from learners in the context of language use that is meaning focused and directed towards some specific goal".

However, adopting tasks for assessment does not merely mean replication of real-life activities, but represents an attempt to accurately depict the communicative abilities of learners. Johnson & Johnson (1994) state that a carefully designed peer assessment can develop learners' communicative skills with their group members, because peer assessment not only provides support but also challenges their peers to bring out their potential. Regarding the criteria used to select an assessment task, a well-specified target language use domain is suggested, referring to a set of specific language use tasks that "the test taker is likely to encounter outside the test itself". Therefore, the authenticity of the tasks is a crucial factor for guaranteeing the fair and generalizable evaluation scores.

Furthermore, Carless (2015) proposed co-assessment, which combines teacher assessment, peer assessment, and self-assessment, and his study demonstrated the positive effects of co-assessment on students. In particular, Carless (2011) developed a sustainable feedback framework that supports students in independently self-monitoring their own work and enhances students' self-regulatory capacities.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sampling

To achieve the study's aim of investigating the implementation of TBLT in Chinese universities from the learners' perspectives, a descriptive quantitative research design was employed. This design was chosen to identify patterns and levels of implementation in terms of learners' perceptions of tasks, grouping, and cooperative learning, as well as co-assessment. Additionally, the study examined differences in responses based on participant demographics, including age, gender, and language proficiency, and aimed to provide actionable recommendations for teacher training in TBLT.

393 Participants based on stratified sampling were EFL learners from three universities in Zhejiang Province: Zhejiang Yuexiu University of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang University, and Zhejiang Normal University. These institutions represent diverse tertiary settings, including public and private universities, as well as comprehensive and teacher education-focused universities. Using the Raosoft sample size calculator with a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level, a recommended sample size of 381 was determined. A total of 393 participants, distributed across four departments (English, Business, Engineering, and Social Science), completed the questionnaire. Participants were stratified by grade (freshman, sophomore, junior) and assessed for language proficiency based on national English tests (CET 3; CET 4; CET 6; TEM 4; TEM 8). Questionnaires were distributed online by English instructors.

3.2 Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was developed and comprised the following sections:

- Demographic Information: Collected participant data on age, gender, grade, major, and language proficiency level.
- Perceptions of TBLT Implementation: Assessed learners' understanding of tasks, grouping, and cooperative learning, and co-assessment using 15 Likert-scale items adapted from Chen & Wang (2019).
- Perceptions of TBLT Effects: Focused on learners' evaluations of TBLT's impact on speaking, writing, and reading comprehension skills through 22 Likert-scale items.
- Learners' Motivation: Measured motivational intensity, desire to learn English, and attitudes toward learning English using 15 Likert-scale items adapted from Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery.

The study was conducted in two stages: (1) Pilot Study: Thirty participants completed the questionnaire to evaluate its reliability and validity. Cronbach's Alpha values (ranging from 0.707 to 0.890) confirmed the instrument's consistency. Feedback was obtained from three experts in English language teaching, and the questionnaire was translated into Chinese to ensure clarity and accuracy. (2) Main Study: The revised questionnaire was administered to the larger sample. Data collected included learners' perceptions of TBLT implementation, its effects, and their motivation levels.

Participants were informed about the purpose and process of the study, and consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by omitting personal details in the questionnaire. Participants could skip questions if they felt uncomfortable.

3.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 23.0, focusing on three dimensions: (1) Learners' Perceptions of TBLT Implementation: Composite and weighted means were calculated for tasks, grouping and cooperative learning, and co-assessment. Rankings and patterns in responses were identified. (2) Perceptions of TBLT Effects: Analyzed responses regarding improvements in speaking, writing, and reading comprehension skills. (3) Changes in Learners' Motivation: Examined motivation levels after TBLT implementation in terms of intensity, desire, and attitudes. To test differences based on participant profiles (e.g., age, gender, proficiency), statistical analyses, including t-tests, ANOVA, and correlation tests, were performed. The findings informed the development of a TBLT program tailored to the Chinese university context.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Profiles

Sex	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Female	325	82.7
Male	68	17.3
Age		
15-19	140	35.6
20-24	230	58.5
25-29	14	3.6
30+	9	2.3
Language Proficiency		
CET 3	5	1.3
CET 4	201	51.1
CET 6	98	24.9
TEM 4	73	18.6
TEM 8	16	4.1

Table 1 presents the percentage distribution of the respondents' profiles.

A total of 393 participants from three universities participated. As indicated, among all the participants for the study, the number of female participants is 325, accounting for 82.7% of the whole respondents; whereas the number of male participants is 68, constituting 17.3% of the total participants. That is to say, female participants account for more than four times the number of male participants, and in universities like foreign language universities and universities oriented to train future middle school teachers, it seemed that there were more girls than boys, and this trend is also revealed in the data of this questionnaire results.

Moreover, the survey included four age groups in terms of age. More specifically, 230 participants aged 20-24 took part in the survey, constituting over half (58.5%) of the total number of participants. This is followed by 140 participants aged between 15 and 19, accounting for 35.6% of the total participants. Only a marginal proportion of mature students (14 participants aged between 25 and 29, and 9 participants aged 30 and above) participated in the questionnaire, accounting for 3.6% and 2.3%, respectively, of the total participants. This distribution indicated that the senior students who participated in the questionnaire accounted for the majority, followed by the freshmen and sophomores. Only a small proportion of mature students who audited the classes participated in the survey.

It is clear that 201 participants have passed CET 4, accounting for 51.1% of the total participants. Ninety-eight (98) participants have passed CET 6, comprising 24.9% of the total respondents. 73 participants have passed TEM 4, accounting for 18.6% of the total participants. 5 participants and 16 participants have passed CET 3 (1.3%) and TEM 8 (4.1%), respectively.

Based on the language proficiency results of the participants, it appears that most students possess an intermediate level of English skills and pass the CET 4, which is appropriately equivalent to the B1 level of the CEFR standard.

Table 2: Implementation of TBLT in Terms of Learners' Perception of Tasks

Items	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Some tasks are closely related to real life.	3.09	Agree	3
2. I gained different skills by finishing tasks.	3.07	Agree	6
3. I think those skills are useful in my future job and life.	3.11	Agree	2
4. To finish each task, I had to do a lot of research in English online.	3.08	Agree	4.5

5. I did all tasks because I was interested in different topics and wanted to know more about them.	3.00	Agree	7
6. I would work harder to improve myself, as I don't want to make the whole team lose points because of me.	3.24	Agree	1
7. I need to use plenty of target languages in finishing tasks.	3.08	Agree	4.5
Composite Mean	**3.10**	**Agree**	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 2 presents the implementation of TBLT in terms of learners' perception of tasks.

The composite mean of learners' perception on tasks is 3.10, which indicates that the participants agreed in general towards the implementation of tasks in English classrooms. In other words, this has demonstrated that the majority of students displayed a positive attitude towards the tasks designed in classroom activities. Participants have recognized the effects of various tasks for their skill development, for their future job and life, and for their commitment in completing these tasks in English classrooms. This is supported by Oxford (2006) when he said that within the L2 teaching and learning classroom, a task can exist as "an outcome-oriented L2 instructional segment", "a general activity or exercise for L2 learners", as well as "a behavioral framework of classroom learning or research". In addition, the finding above is also reflected in Chen and Wang's (2009) study, which demonstrated that EFL learners in universities have a positive attitude toward designed tasks after the implementation of TBLT.

More specifically, Table 2 also presented the ranking of learners' perceptions of tasks. Among all the items cited above, all of them were assessed as agreeable. In particular, the highest weighted mean score is 3.24, indicating that students chose to put in more effort to improve themselves; in this way, they did not want to cause their team to lose points due to the problems. A possible implication of this finding is that TBLT had inspired the learners to be more active in completing the team work together, and in that way, TBLT had achieved the goal of providing more opportunities for learners to interact with team members, and this is one of the potential powerful advantages of TBLT compared with traditional English teaching context in China. This is further supported by Tuyen & An (2019), who reported that TBLT can enhance interaction between students and enhance language skills and knowledge. However, this is contradictory to Broady's (2006) argument, who noted that TBLT may not provide sufficient "Interaction Opportunities".

The second rank in the weighted mean is 3.11, indicating that students believed these skills gained from completing TBLT tasks were beneficial for their future, as TBLT can help students develop their creativity, communication skills, and organizational abilities (Chen & Wang, 2019). Therefore, it indicated that learners confirmed the practical advantages of TBLT for cultivating various skills for their future. This is partly due to the focus of TBLT on meanings instead of on forms, which is in line with Nunan (2004)'s definition on task, who stated that "[A task is] a piece of classroom work which involved learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form."

Closely related to this is the third rank, with a weighted mean of 3.09, which indicates that learners have chosen tasks closely related to real life. This also acknowledges the authenticity of the tasks, aligning with the statement that tasks involved real-life activities in a pedagogical setting. Meanwhile, this was also supported by the communicative nature of tasks, as indicated in Nunan (2004), "the task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right".

On the other hand, the weighted score of other items, though also interpreted as "Agree" in general, was below the composite mean of 3.10. Followed these in the rank were Item 4, 7, and 2, with weighted means of 3.08, 3.08, and 3.07 respectively. They confirmed that they had conducted extensive online research, indicating that TBLT has provided them with more opportunities to search for information independently, with the help of the internet. This highlights the potential value of TBLT in cultivating their self-learning ability and independent capabilities. Similar results were reported by Chen & Wang (2019), who maintained that TBLT has greatly enhanced students' autonomous learning abilities.

In a similar vein, Item 7 has a similar weighted score, and students regard it as necessary to apply a lot of target languages in completing various tasks. This demonstrated that learners believed that TBLT offered more chances for the majority of learners to use the target language to express themselves. Some of them did not support this statement, possibly because they were unable to use the target language consistently to successfully complete the tasks due to reasons such as low English proficiency. This was supported by a well-specified target language use domain in TBLT classrooms (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) and by Wills (1996), who proposed that students use the target language so as to attain the task's goals in the "task cycle".

Additionally, regarding item 2, the weighted mean score is 3.07, indicating that the majority of participants recognized they had acquired different skills by completing the tasks. This was further

proved by Chen & Wang (2019), who also concluded that TBLT can improve students' organizational abilities and communication skills. However, this weighted mean is lower than item 3 (3.11), which concerns the usefulness of skills gained from TBLT for future job or life. This seeming discrepancy may be attributed to the differences in the recognition of the importance of such skills by students and the actual effects of acquiring these skills.

Item 5 has the lowest weighted score of 3.00, regarding the process of conducting TBLT, and checking whether students were keen on the topics in the classroom and whether they wanted to explore much more information. According to the teaching experience and classroom observation, most of the students actually showed great interest in the tasks, and they were willing to participate in the tasks. This was also reflected in Chen & Wang's (2019) study, and this item ranked last. This may indicate that teachers still need to further develop their approach to selecting suitable topics for classroom tasks and to arouse students' curiosity about new knowledge.

Table 3. Implementation of TBLT in Terms of Learners' Perceptions on Grouping and Cooperative Learning

Items	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. I like to work with my team members and share my thoughts with them.	3.10	Agree	2.5
2. I am not afraid of giving a speech in small groups.	2.85	Agree	5
3. I would like to offer help to my team members whenever he/she need it in English learning.	3.17	Agree	1
4. My team members always encourage me to volunteer answers in our English class.	3.05	Agree	4
5. Before each task, our team would spend time in discussion and plan our steps properly.	3.10	Agree	2.5
Composite Mean	**3.06**	**Agree**	

Table 3 presents the learners' perceptions on grouping and cooperative learning.

The composite mean is 3.06, indicating that in general, the participants acknowledge their positive attitude towards grouping and cooperative learning in TBLT. From the above findings, it can be seen that TBLT has significantly increased grouping and cooperative learning, a finding also validated by Chen and Wang (2019). This can be easily explained by the nature of TBLT, as well as the different tasks involved in various stages of classroom activities. Meanwhile, this is one of

the advantages of TBLT compared to traditional English teaching. Moreover, this is also in line with the essence of "learning by doing" (Ellis, 2003; Ellis et al., 2020), as advocated in TBLT. Students can work in small groups to maximize their potential and encourage active learning, mutual help, and sharing among group members in English classrooms.

Meanwhile, the table also presents the ranks of weighted mean scores for each item in this sub-domain, showing a somewhat wide range of differences among specific items. More specifically, the weighted mean score of Item 3 on willingness to offer team members a hand whenever he/she need it in English learning is 3.17, which ranked first. The information above indicates that an overwhelming majority of students responded positively to group work and communicativeness in their language learning. When fulfilling the tasks, students were aware that they needed to communicate and participate with team members, and nearly all students showed initiative to help others in group language learning. This mutual help practice in TBLT was also observed in Chen & Wang's (2019) study, which found that students were more likely to be exposed to opportunities for mutual help among peers.

The same weighted score was obtained for Item 5, concerning the proper preparation time for the team in discussion and planning the next steps. This indicates that participants agreed their team would spend sufficient time in various relevant discussions and develop proper plans. This is closely related to Prabhu's (1987) and Willis's (1996) pre-task stage, although a difference also exists, as the latter is more closely related to the lead-in task prepared by the teacher, rather than by the students.

The fourth-ranked weighted mean score is 3.05, for Item 4, which reflects constant encouragement from team members to volunteer to answer questions in English class. The participants agreed that they can get encouragement from their team members for fulfilling TBLT tasks. These items indicate that, during the learning process, most team members can benefit from and receive support from either other members or the team's cooperation. Meanwhile, TBLT can promote good relations among students and foster an atmosphere of collaboration in group work. A similar result was also reported by Huang (2016), who emphasized the importance of encouragement from peers in TBLT.

However, the last item in the rank is Item 2, which requires being bold enough to deliver a speech in relatively small groups, with a weighted mean score of 2.85. This is the only item with a score lower than the composite mean for this sub-domain. In the meantime, these people strongly agree or agree on items 1 and 3. It can also be seen that learners have some anxiety in participating in some tasks such as speaking in front of classrooms. This illustrated that not all learners were comfortable giving a speech in groups, although they have realized they need to cooperate and

work with others. Maybe teachers need to think twice on this issue and try to work out how to reduce students' anxiety and encourage practices such as delivering a speech in small groups.

Table 4. Implementation of TBLT in Terms of Learners' Perceptions on Co-assessment

Items	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. I like peer assessment because I can learn different views except the teacher's.	3.07	Agree	2
2. I like peer assessment because I can observe others' work and learn from other learners.	3.09	Agree	1
3. I like self-assessment because I can reflect on my homework.	3.03	Agree	3
Composite Mean	**3.06**	**Agree**	

Table 4 provides information on peer assessment and self-assessment in group work.

The composite mean for this sub-domain is 3.06, which indicates a positive perception of students' feedback on co-assessment in TBLT. Generally speaking, peer assessment is viewed more positively compared to self-assessment, as it allows individuals to learn from others and consider different perspectives. This was supported by Chen & Wang (2019), who emphasized that task-based language assessment was an important factor in task-based language teaching and that both peer assessment and self-assessment were conducted by teachers when implementing TBLT in EFL classrooms in China.

In terms of the ranks of weighted mean scores of these three items in this sub-domain, the item that ranks first is that students like peer assessment because they can watch others' work and then learn from other learners, with a weighted mean score of 3.09. This suggests that peer assessment in TBLT is welcomed by participants, as they can learn from one another. The findings above align with other similar studies (e.g., Falchikov, 1986; Stefani, 1992; Chen & Wang, 2019), which also affirm that co-assessment can help students learn from each other and generate positive effects on students' development after the implementation of TBLT.

The second one in the rank is item 1, which indicates that students preferred peer assessment, and this is because they can acquire different perspectives except teachers, with a weighted mean score of 3.07. In group work, every member has the opportunity to learn new expressions and ideas from others related to the tasks. They are motivated to participate and can give feedback to others while also receiving feedback from them. And in this process, each person gets to understand their own

advantage or disadvantage compared to other members. Similarly, Hirose (2012) also suggested that written and spoken peer feedback can help improve students' performance by providing access to different points of view beyond those of teachers alone.

The last item in the rank is item 3 concerning self-assessment, with a weighted mean score of 3.03. This showed that, although both peer assessment and self-assessment play significant roles in group work, more people preferred the former, which implied that it provides more help in developing their English skills. This contradicts Carless's (2011) study, which found that self-assessment in TBLT can enhance students' self-monitoring in independent work.

Table 5. Summary Table on Implementation of TBLT

Items	Composite Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Learners' perceptions of tasks	3.10	Agree	1
2. Learners' perceptions on grouping and cooperative learning	3.06	Agree	2.5
3. Learners' perceptions on co-assessment	3.06	Agree	2.5
Composite Mean	**3.07**	**Agree**	

Table 5 presents a summary of students' perceptions towards the implementation of TBLT.

The composite mean of this table is 3.07, with verbal interpretation of "Agree" for all of them. This indicated a positive attitude among students' perceptions of TBLT implementation in terms of tasks, grouping, cooperative learning, and co-assessment, although with a slight variation in specific items. This positive attitude of students' perception of TBLT implementation in terms of tasks, grouping and cooperative learning and co-assessment has also been validated in previous literature (e.g. Chen & Wang, 2009; Tuyen & An, 2019; Huang, 2016; etc.), which provided a valuable reference when it comes to the pedagogical implications in TBLT in the practice of English teaching in Chinese tertiary settings.

Among the three items, learners' perceptions of tasks obtained the highest composite mean of 3.10, which showed that students have the most positive attitude towards the basic concepts of tasks. This is also supported by Chen and Wang (2009), who have proved that university English language learners have a positive attitude toward understanding designed tasks as well as the nature of tasks for TBLT.

The item related to learners' perceptions on co-assessment came second in the rank, with a weighted mean of 3.06. It showed that students have a favorable opinion of co-assessment in TBLT. The third item in the ranking is learners' perceptions of grouping and cooperative learning, with a composite mean of 3.05. This suggests that students have a positive attitude towards grouping and cooperative learning in TBLT activities, a finding also confirmed in relevant studies (Chen & Wang, 2019).

Table 6 illustrates the comparison of TBLT implementation grouped by profile. As seen from the result, there was a significant difference when grouped according to sex and age (except for learners' perceptions on co-assessment) since the obtained p-values were less than 0.05. This means that the responses differ significantly, and based on the post hoc test conducted, it was found that males and those aged 15 to 19 experienced a greater extent of implementation.

Table 6. Difference in the Implementation of TBLT when grouped according to Profiles

Sex	χ^2_c / **U**	**p-value**	**Interpretation**
Learners' perceptions of tasks	8729.5	0.004	Significant
Learners' perceptions on grouping and cooperative learning	8749	0.004	Significant
Learners' perceptions on co-assessment	9381.5	0.023	Significant
Age			
Learners' perceptions of tasks	12.825	0.005	Significant
Learners' perceptions on grouping and cooperative learning	9.162	0.027	Significant
Learners' perceptions on co-assessment	6.676	0.083	Not Significant
Language Proficiency Level			
Learners' perceptions of tasks	3.959	0.412	Not Significant
Learners' perceptions on grouping and cooperative learning	3.016	0.555	Not Significant
Learners' perceptions on co-assessment	2.438	0.656	Not Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.05

The reported result, that male students have more favorable perceptions of tasks and cooperative learning, is consistent with the study by Aguillon et al. (2020), who identified greater gender gaps in participation and found that men were more active in voluntary responses after small-group discussions. Similarly, Eddy et al. (2014) have also reported that women participated less than expected across more than twenty courses, and that although women constituted 60% of all the students, their voices were only heard in 40% of the classroom tasks in response to teachers' questions. In contrast, Rudd (2019) found that there were no significant gender differences in

responses to TBLT, although male students' improvements approached statistical significance ($p = .611$).

The result of male learners' better implementation of TBLT can possibly be attributed to relevant studies on gender identity and its impact on student affect in classrooms. For instance, Eddy and Brownell (2016) have argued that self-efficacy is often higher in men than in women, and Cokley et al. (2015) have suggested that women tend to display a higher saliency of gender identity in classroom participation.

In addition, learners aged 15-19 were found to have experienced a great extent of implementation of TBLT. This means that students who have just started their university studies found that TBLT is quite different from the traditional English teaching methods that they encountered in their secondary schools. They welcome this change by embracing TBLT principles and engaging in classroom activities, working more actively with their classmates, and maintaining a positive attitude towards group learning and cooperative learning in English classrooms. However, there is no significant difference among groups of different ages in terms of learners' perceptions of assessment, and similar responses are obtained for learners' perceptions of co-assessment and self-assessment.

On the other hand, no significant difference was found in terms of responses on the implementation of TBLT when grouped according to language proficiency level, as the obtained p-values were greater than 0.05. This is different from Rudd (2019)'s study, who maintained that learners' responses to TBLT were based on linguistic potential. Based on a survey of TBLT programs participated in by 81 second-year university business studies students in Bangkok, he found that linguistically responsive students implemented TBLT better than struggling students. One possible reason for the difference in results may lie in the varying standards used for group division of language proficiency. The current study utilizes Standard English tests in the Chinese context, such as CET3, CET4, CET6, TEM4, and TEM8, which focus more on English competency in listening, reading, and writing. In contrast, Rudd (2019) divided the groups according to oral English language proficiency.

Therefore, the awareness of possible gender and age differences in the implementation of TBLT served as the first step towards creating an equitable learning environment in TBLT English classes. Teachers should make a concerted effort in TBLT classrooms to encourage equal participation from all students, thereby maximizing the benefits of TBLT in EFL classrooms in China. For instance, for younger learners who just encounter TBLT in ESL teaching, teachers may need to adopt more input-based tasks such as simple listening and reading tasks to provide the basis for output-based tasks later (Ellis, 2020).

Table 7. Proposed Program to Enhance the Implementation of TBLT in EFL Classes in China

Key Result Areas & Objectives	Strategies or Activities	Key Performance Indicator	Persons Involved
I. Implementation of TBLT			
1.1 Learners' perceptions on grouping and cooperative learning			
To improve learners' perceptions on grouping and cooperative learning	**Redesign syllabus with focus on cooperative learning strategies; Create activities such as "Cooperative Learning is Fun";** Design appropriate forms of grouping activities and cooperative learning activities by taking students' actual situations into consideration. **Encourage students in proper forms of output for group activities, with gradual promotion of various activities.** Teachers had better not take slightly challenging activities such as giving a speech in small group from the start, since most of the students have somewhat phobia of public speech in groups. Teachers may choose alternative ways such as pair work or collective activities. Methods of participation in completing tasks in grouping and cooperative learning should be varied, and the challenging activity like giving a speech in small group may not be the best way to start.	Syllabus designs with interesting cooperative activities in classrooms are reviewed in advance, and if possible, with feedback or comments solicited from some students before use in class.	Faculty; EFL teachers; students
1.2 Learners' perceptions on co-assessment			
To encourage to adopt appropriate	**Advocate peer assessment in TBLT.**	Varied scientific and diversified peer assessment	EFL teachers; students

assessment methods, especially peer assessment.	The advantages and effects of peer assessment is highly recognized by students, so it is strongly advocated in TBLT practice. In contrast, self-assessment does not gain much popularity.	is adopted in TBLT, with different views welcomed to help students learn from each other.	
1.3 Learners' perception on tasks			
a. To further enhance students' understanding of tasks for TBLT; in particular, arouse students' interests by various topics of tasks.	**Design lesson plans with tasks that can arouse students' interest.** Teachers needs to plan carefully in advance in various stages of class, and design interesting topics that students would like to know more. More reference books on lesson plans for EFL English with interesting tasks are needed.	EFL English text compliers are also encouraged to design pertinent reference books.	EFL teachers; learners; textbook compliers
b. Scientifically design tasks in EFL teaching with integration of language and skills.	**Integrate language development and skill enhancement in lesson plan.** EFL teachers need to take outcomes of students' skill development as one of the ultimate goals when they design lesson plans in TBLT. The integration of English language competence and skill capability is necessary.	Design of tasks should not be valued by the lesson plans per se, but the outcome of the TBLT in terms of students' skill improvement should also be taken into consideration.	Faculty; English supervisors; EFL teachers; textbook compliers

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the discussion and analysis about the data shown in the previous sections, and in combination with the results obtained from this study, the following conclusions are drawn so as to get ready to provide answers to the research questions proposed in the previous sections.

1. In terms of demographics of the study, most of the respondents were females, between 20 - 24, and CET 4 passers.
2. The study has reported an overall satisfactory perception of tasks in terms of the level of implementation of TBLT in the EFL classrooms in Chinese universities, including learners' positive attitudes towards tasks, perceptions on grouping and cooperative learning and perceptions on co-assessment;
3. When grouped according to different profiles (age, gender and language proficiency level), no significant difference is found on their responses, except on implementation of TBLT when grouped to sex and age (except on learners' perceptions on co-assessment) as well as the effects of TBLT on speaking skills when grouped to sex.
4. Highly significant associations are found between and among implementation, effects and motivation of TBLT.
5. Based on the previous results and analysis, the researcher proposed a program to enhance the implementation of TBLT at the tertiary level.

6. LIMITATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following lists some specific recommendations based on the findings of the study in order to properly localize and adapt TBLT in China and attempt to achieve sustainable professional teacher development, with the hope to shed some new light on the practice of TBLT in English classes of universities in China.

1. The English department of the concerned universities may consider the proposed program for implementation and evaluation after. The English department should prioritize TBLT in teacher training and continually send teachers to attend training on the latest developments in TBLT, thereby acquiring a systematic basis for theoretical knowledge on the subject. Meanwhile, the English department shall have designed some pertinent policies on flexibility when applying TBLT in the local practice of English teaching in China.

2. Teachers in the English department of the concerned universities should attend training of TBLT seminars and practice sharing regularly. More specifically, teachers may adopt the weak version of TBLT, which might be a more appropriate approach in China (Luo & Yi, 2013), which would better meet the needs of local tertiary settings in China. Moreover, English teachers in the concerned universities need to pay attention to individual differences among learners when implementing TBLT, as gender and age are significant factors that influence the perception of task implementation.

3. Students in the concerned universities may actively take part in the TBLT activities designed by the teachers so as to achieve the maximum performance results of English speaking, reading, and writing skills. Students are encouraged to take part in group activities in the three

phases of TBLT in classrooms (i.e., pre-task phase, while-task phase, and post-task phase), with a balance between focus on meaning and focus on form.

4. Future researchers may be encouraged to do some experimental research to further study the effects of TBLT on Chinese EFL students' performances. In addition, teachers' perceptions of task implementation may also be an interesting area to explore. Meanwhile, if possible, similar studies may be extended to EFL learning in other settings, such as secondary schools in China.

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Digital Learning and Its Efficacy for Distance Learners in Sustainable Learning Development: A Malaysian Case Study of Urban-Rural Disparities During the COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

***Objective*:** This study examines the effectiveness of digital learning in fostering Sustainable Learning Development (SLD) among distance learners in Malaysia, with a particular focus on urban-rural disparities during the COVID-19 Movement Control Order (MCO).

Methods: Through qualitative review and content analysis of 58 Scopus-indexed studies and policy documents from 2019 to 2024, the study identifies critical challenges in infrastructure, pedagogical adaptation, learner engagement, and policy response.

Results: A comparative case study, drawing on prior studies, reveals systemic inequities in digital access and readiness, particularly affecting rural and Indigenous communities. While digital platforms offer potential for inclusive and resilient education, their uneven deployment risks deepening existing divides.

Conclusions: The study proposes strategic interventions, including localized content, teacher training, and community-based learning hubs. to strengthen Malaysia's digital education ecosystem and align with SDG 4 goals for equitable, lifelong learning.

Keywords Digital learning; Sustainable Learning Development; Distance education; Educational equity; COVID-19; Urban-rural divide; Malaysia; SDG 4; Online pedagogy

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped educational landscapes worldwide, accelerating the adoption of digital learning as a mainstream mode of instruction. In Malaysia, the enforcement of the Movement Control Order (MCO) in March 2020 led to the closure of physical schools and a rapid pivot to online platforms such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, and the Ministry of Education (MOE)'s Digital Educational Learning Initiative Malaysia (DELIMa) (Razali et al., 2023; Thang et al., 2022; Othman et al., 2020).

These adoptions, while providing timely solutions and mitigating learning disruptions during MCO, also exposed disparities in access, infrastructure, and digital literacy, particularly among distance learners in rural and underserved communities (Ismail et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2022). The urgency to maintain learning continuity during crises has foregrounded the concept of Sustainable Learning Development (SLD), which emphasizes resilience, inclusivity, and adaptability in education systems.

SLD is increasingly recognized as a multidimensional framework that integrates lifelong learning, environmental awareness, and digital competence to prepare learners for uncertain futures. In the Malaysian context, SLD is closely aligned with the national education blueprint and Sustainable Development Goal 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education (MOE, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic has thus served as both a catalyst and a stress test for Malaysia's digital education infrastructure. While initiatives such as distributing tablets and data packages to B40 families and deploying PdPR (home-based learning) have mitigated some challenges, systemic inequities persist (Asadullah, 2022). Studies indicate that digital learning, when supported by robust infrastructure and inclusive pedagogy, can enhance learner autonomy, engagement, and critical thinking —key pillars of SLD (Tan et al., 2022; Lee & Ramli, 2023).

Yet, without targeted interventions, digital learning risks reinforcing existing educational inequalities. This paper aims to critically examine the efficacy of digital learning in promoting SLD among distance learners in Malaysia, with a particular focus on urban-rural disparities during the COVID-19 MCO period.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sustainable Learning Development (SLD)

SLD is a transformative educational paradigm aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4): "*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*" (UNESCO, 2020), which emphasizes not only access to education but also its adaptability, relevance, and resilience in the face of environmental, technological, and social disruptions. SLD integrates digital literacy, environmental consciousness, and lifelong learning into curricula and pedagogy, preparing learners to navigate complex global challenges. In this context, digital learning becomes a critical enabler of SLD, especially for distance learners who face geographic and socioeconomic barriers to traditional education.

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed significant gaps in achieving SDG 4 and operationalizing SLD. According to UNESCO (2021), over 1.6 billion learners were affected by school closures, with marginalized communities and countries experiencing disproportionate setbacks. While digital platforms offered continuity, their uneven deployment highlighted infrastructural and pedagogical inequities. For instance, studies from South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have revealed that rural and Indigenous learners often lack access to devices, internet connectivity, and culturally relevant content (Khan et al., 2022; Mtebe & Raphael, 2023). The absence of multilingual and offline-compatible learning materials further marginalizes non-dominant language speakers and Indigenous communities, limiting their ability to engage meaningfully with digital education. In Malaysia, while efforts to align national education policy with SDG 4 and SLD principles have gained momentum, persistent gaps remain.

In the context of digital learning, the MOE's initiatives, such as the Digital Educational Learning Initiative Malaysia (DELIMa) and the home-based PdPR system, aimed to democratize access during the COVID-19 MCO. Nevertheless, rural learners, especially in Sabah, Sarawak, and the interior of the Peninsular region, continue to face infrastructural disparities, a lack of digital literacy, and limited parental support (Ismail et al., 2023; Ariffin et al., 2024). This phenomenon is consistent with observations on the digital divide in studies of rural learners (Samane-Cutipa et al., 2022; Graves et al., 2021; Olanrewaju et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the lack of offline-compatible, multilingual content has disproportionately affected Indigenous and non-Malay-speaking students. Studies have observed that mainstream digital platforms often fail to accommodate linguistic diversity and Indigenous knowledge systems, leading to digital inequalities (Zheng & Walsham, 2021; Makananise, 2024). This results in

disengagement and exclusion (Azman et al., 2024). In the absence of culturally relevant educational approaches and language-sensitive design, digital learning risks reinforcing existing educational inequalities rather than resolving them (Ersoy, 2023; Zhao, 2023; Van De Werfhorst et al., 2022).

2.2. Distance Learners: Conceptualization, Historical Development, and Emerging Patterns

King and Colleagues (2001) defined distance learning as "the improved capabilities in knowledge and/or behaviors as a result of mediated experiences that are constrained by time and/or distance such that the learner does not share the same situation with what is being learned". They further defined distance education as "the formalized instructional learning where the time or geographic situation constrains learning by not affording in-person contact between student and instructor".

Moore & Kearsley (2012) suggest this mode of learning accommodates diverse learner profiles, including those constrained by geography, employment, or personal responsibilities. Thus, distance learners are individuals who engage in educational activities remotely, often through digital or correspondence methods, without being physically present in a traditional classroom setting, while distance education can be delivered synchronously or asynchronously, with increasing reliance on digital platforms to enhance accessibility and engagement (Lima et al., 2020; Shah, 2024). The origins of distance education can be traced to 19th-century correspondence courses, followed by radio and television-based instruction in the mid-20th century.

Salama & Hinton (2023) observed online education has developed through four phases: 1) internet-driven distance education in the 1990s; 2) a rise in the use of learning management systems (LMS) between 2000 and 2007; 3) flourishing of the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) between 2008 and 2012; and presently, where it is rapidly evolving as an equal, and sometimes preferred, option to face-to-face learning (Palvia et al., 2018).

As the world advances into the digital information era, distance learners increasingly rely on mobile devices, cloud-based platforms, and microlearning modules to access educational content (Criollo-C et al., 2021; Garshasbi et al., 2021; Wu & Plakhtii, 2021). Artificial Intelligence (AI) and learning analytics (LA) are driving a global shift in distance education, enabling more personalized, adaptive, and data-informed learning experiences (Salas-Pilco et al., 2022; Ungerer & Slade, 2022; Dogan et al., 2023). With the rise of online platforms, institutions are increasingly using AI to automate feedback, predict learner performance, and tailor content delivery. Meanwhile, LA tools help educators monitor engagement and intervene early. This trend reflects

a growing emphasis on scalable, student-centered approaches that blend technology with pedagogy to improve outcomes in remote and hybrid learning environments. In Malaysia, public institutions have played pivotal roles in advancing distance education, particularly for working adults and learners in rural regions.

The digital divide persists in Malaysia, with rural distance learners facing challenges such as limited internet connectivity, a lack of access to devices, and language barriers, which negatively impact their engagement and learning outcomes (Azman et al., 2024). Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring that distance education makes a meaningful contribution to SLD and aligns with the broader goals of educational equity.

2.3 Digital Learning: Definition, Historical Evolution, and Contemporary Trends

Digital learning encompasses the use of digital technologies to facilitate teaching and learning across various modalities, including online, blended, and mobile learning environments. It emphasizes learner autonomy, interactivity, and access to diverse multimedia resources, enabling flexible and personalized educational experiences (Lim & Nor, 2020). In the Malaysian context, digital learning is increasingly integrated into national education strategies, particularly in response to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Historically, digital learning evolved from early computer-assisted instruction in the 1960s to web-based e-learning platforms in the 1990s, followed by the proliferation of cloud-based and mobile learning systems in the 2010s. Malaysia's Smart School initiative laid the groundwork for digital integration in public education, while the more recent Digital Educational Learning Initiative Malaysia (DELIMa) sought to centralize digital resources and platforms for nationwide access (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2024; MOE, 2023). These efforts reflect a broader global trend toward digital transformation in education systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated the global adoption of digital learning. In Malaysia, the MCO necessitated a rapid shift to online platforms such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, and WhatsApp, particularly for home-based teaching and learning (Ismail et al., 2023). Emerging trends include the increased use of asynchronous learning tools, the rise of mobile-first learning in rural areas, and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) for adaptive learning. Despite these advancements, disparities in access and digital readiness persist, especially among rural and marginalized communities (Tan et al., 2022; Ariffin et al., 2024). These inequities pose significant challenges to achieving inclusive and sustainable learning outcomes.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative content analysis methodology to systematically examine the efficacy of digital learning in supporting SLD among distance learners in Malaysia, with particular attention to urban-rural disparities during the COVID-19 MCO. Content analysis is a robust interpretive technique used to identify patterns, themes, and meanings within textual data, making it suitable for synthesizing findings from diverse scholarly sources and policy documents (Krippendorff, 2018). The approach was adopted to enable a nuanced understanding of how digital learning practices intersect with issues of equity, access, and pedagogical adaptation in the Malaysian educational landscape.

The data corpus comprised 58 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2019 and 2024, all indexed in Scopus and selected based on relevance to digital learning, distance education, educational equity, and SLD. The inclusion criteria required that studies focus on Malaysia or comparable Southeast Asian contexts, address post-pandemic educational challenges, and provide empirical or policy-based insights into the implementation of digital learning.

Secondary sources included official reports from the MOE, UNESCO publications on SDG 4, and select case studies from regional initiatives such as IndigiLearn. These sources were triangulated to enrich contextual understanding and validate thematic findings. The findings revealed five thematic categories: (1) infrastructure and access, (2) pedagogical adaptation, (3) learner engagement, (4) equity and inclusion, and (5) policy response.

This methodological design enabled a comprehensive and context-sensitive exploration of the role of digital learning in advancing SLD in Malaysia. It also facilitated critical comparisons between urban and rural learner experiences, revealing systemic gaps and opportunities for policy intervention. The findings derived from this approach are presented in the subsequent sections, with thematic synthesis and illustrative case examples.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Grammarly Results

The appropriateness of grammar is about 97%, and plagiarism is 4%.

4.2 Word Cloud

Figure 1. Word Clouds
https://www.wordclouds.com/

5. DISCUSSIONS

A systematic literature review was conducted to examine the efficacy of digital learning in supporting SLD for distance learners in Malaysia, particularly during the COVID-19 MCO. The review focused on peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2024, indexed in Scopus, and selected based on relevance to digital pedagogy, educational equity, and rural-urban disparities. Keywords included “digital learning”, “distance education”, “Malaysia”, “COVID-19”, “rural learners,” and “sustainable learning”. The final corpus included 61 studies, which were thematically identified into four categories: 1) infrastructure and access, 2) pedagogical adaptation, 3) Learner Engagement and Motivation, and 4) Policy Response.

5.1 Infrastructure and Access

Infrastructure and access emerged as the most frequently cited barrier to effective digital learning in Malaysia. Studies consistently reported that rural learners faced significant challenges due to poor internet connectivity, limited access to devices, and unreliable electricity supply (Ismail et al., 2023; Ariffin et al., 2024). In contrast, urban students benefited from stable broadband, personal devices, and supportive home environments. This digital divide was further exacerbated during the MCO, when learning shifted entirely online. Tan et al. (2022) found that 78% of urban students could attend online classes regularly, compared to only 42% of rural students. These disparities directly undermine the principles of SLD, which emphasize equitable access and lifelong learning opportunities.

5.2 Pedagogical Adaptation

Pedagogical adaptation was another critical theme. Teachers were required to transition rapidly to digital platforms, often without adequate training or support. While some educators have embraced innovative tools, such as asynchronous video lessons and gamified learning, many struggle with basic digital competencies. The lack of culturally responsive and multilingual content further marginalized Indigenous and non-Malay-speaking students (Azman et al., 2024). Offline-compatible resources were scarce, leaving students in low-connectivity zones unable to participate meaningfully. These findings suggest that digital learning, when poorly localized, risks reinforcing systemic exclusion rather than promoting SLD.

5.3 Learner Engagement and Motivation

Learner engagement and motivation also varied significantly across contexts. Urban students reported higher levels of satisfaction, autonomy, and digital fluency, whereas rural learners experienced isolation, frustration, and a decline in academic performance (Tan et al., 2022; Lee & Ramli, 2023). The absence of interactive feedback, peer collaboration, and emotional support contributed to disengagement. Abdullah et al. (2021) noted that rural students often relied on WhatsApp or SMS to receive assignments, which limited their exposure to rich multimedia content and critical thinking exercises.

It is observed that the integration of AI-assisted tools into educational environments presents a dual-edged impact on learner engagement and motivation (Noor, 2025). On the upside, these technologies offer personalized learning experiences, immediate feedback, and adaptive content delivery, which can enhance student interest and autonomy, foster deeper cognitive engagement and sustained motivation (Sumanthy & Navamani, 2024; Mahmoud & Sørensen, 2024).

However, the ease of access to automated solutions also introduces risks of academic dishonesty, passive learning behaviors, and diminished critical thinking (Padillah, 2024). Learners may become overly reliant on AI-generated outputs, undermining the development of essential analytical and problem-solving skills (Zhai et al., 2024). Furthermore, disparities in access to AI tools may exacerbate existing educational inequities.

These limitations challenge the efficacy of digital learning as a tool for fostering the holistic competencies central to SLD.

5.4 Policy Responses

Policy responses during the pandemic were mixed. The Ministry of Education launched initiatives such as DELIMa, PdPR, and device distribution programs targeting B40 households. However, implementation was uneven, and monitoring mechanisms were limited (MOE, 2023). While these efforts signaled a commitment to SDG 4, they lacked long-term sustainability and failed to address structural inequities. Comparative studies from Indonesia and Thailand revealed more integrated approaches, including community-based learning hubs and localized content development (Rahman et al., 2023; Suksomboon & Chaiyasit, 2024). Malaysia's experience highlights the need for systemic reform, cross-sectoral collaboration, and inclusive digital education strategies to fully realize the potential of SLD.

5.5 Case Study: Urban vs. Rural Learners During COVID-19 MCO

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent enforcement of Malaysia's MCO in March 2020 triggered an unprecedented shift to digital learning across all levels of education. This case study examines the differential experiences of urban and rural distance learners during the MCO period, highlighting structural inequities and pedagogical challenges that shaped learner engagement and outcomes.

Drawing on empirical findings from selected studies (Ariffin et al., 2024; Ramli & Mohd, 2023; Rahman et al., 2023; Mahmud & Rosli, 2022; Khan et al., 2022; Abdullah et al., 2021; Omar & Hashim, 2021; Lim & Nor, 2020;) within the review corpus, the analysis underscores the complex interplay between infrastructure, socioeconomic status, and digital readiness in determining the efficacy of online education.

In urban backdrops such as Penang, Selangor, and Kuala Lumpur, students generally benefited from stable internet connectivity, access to personal digital devices, and supportive home

environments. These conditions facilitated smoother transitions to online platforms. Urban learners reported higher levels of engagement, autonomy, and satisfaction with digital learning modalities (Tan et al., 2022).

Additionally, it is noted that parental involvement and digital literacy were significantly higher among urban households, which contributed to more consistent participation and academic continuity (Ramli & Mohd, 2023). Teachers in urban schools were also more likely to have prior exposure to digital tools and received targeted professional development during the pandemic (Mahmud & Rosli, 2022).

Conversely, rural learners, particularly those in Sabah, Sarawak, and the interior of the Peninsular region, faced substantial barriers to digital learning (Hashim & Yunus, 2020). Limited broadband infrastructure, intermittent electricity supply, and the absence of personal devices constrained their ability to access online content (Ismail et al., 2023; Ahmad & Jamil, 2021). Many students relied on shared mobile phones and low-bandwidth applications, such as WhatsApp, to receive assignments, which limited interactivity and pedagogical depth (Abdullah et al., 2021).

Language barriers and the lack of culturally responsive, multilingual content further marginalized Indigenous and non-Malay-speaking students (Luaran et al., 2016; Nordin & Alias, 2023; Azman et al., 2024). Teachers in rural schools often lacked digital training and were forced to improvise with limited resources, resulting in inconsistent instructional quality and learner disengagement. Azman et al. (2024) further argue that traditional learning preferences, communal values, and limited access to culturally relevant content hinder engagement. The absence of multilingual and offline-compatible resources exacerbates exclusion, particularly during crises such as COVID-19 (Salleh & Zainal, 2022).

6. CONCLUSION

The urban-rural divide in digital learning during the MCO period reflects broader systemic inequities in Malaysia's education system. While urban learners were able to leverage digital platforms to maintain academic progress, rural learners experienced significant disruptions, with some studies reporting increased dropout risks and psychosocial stress (Ariffin et al., 2024). The shift to digital learning in Malaysia, especially during the COVID-19 MCO, revealed several key challenges that hinder SLD, particularly for distance learners in rural areas.

These disparities challenge the notion of digital learning as a universally accessible solution and highlight the need for differentiated strategies that take into account contextual realities. The case

study reveals that without targeted infrastructure investment, inclusive content development, and sustained teacher support, digital learning may inadvertently exacerbate educational inequalities rather than mitigate them.

Lastly, proper education on learning ethics should begin at an early stage to prevent the abuse of AI-assisted tools. By instilling values of academic integrity, critical thinking, and responsible technology use from the outset, educators can cultivate a generation of learners who view AI not as a shortcut, but as a partner in deeper inquiry and creativity. This foundation is essential to ensure that AI enhances learning outcomes rather than undermines them, fostering a culture of trust, originality, and lifelong learning.

7. RECOMMENDATION

To address these challenges, Malaysia should prioritize the development of rural infrastructure, including community Wi-Fi hubs and solar-powered devices. Content must be localized, multilingual, and accessible both online and offline. Teachers need ongoing professional development in inclusive digital teaching. Community learning centers can offer safe spaces for hybrid learning and support services. Finally, monitoring systems should track progress and guide policy adjustments. These strategies are essential to ensure that digital learning supports equitable, inclusive, and sustainable education for all learners in Malaysia. Survey studies, such as questionnaires and interviews, are recommended for further studies.

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Qualitative Research Methodology : Interview Strategy

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This article proposes a research methodology for a qualitative approach that focuses on the interview strategy.

Method: The qualitative research methodology employs data collection and analysis. The first step is to select secondary data to develop the research instrument (interview questions). The second step is to collect and analyze data based on interviews with a sample size of respondents that is appropriate for the study.

Results: A qualitative interview research is required for the introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, conclusion, limitations, and recommendations. The study's setting, population, and sampling are necessary. Typically, purposive sampling is employed to ensure the respondents are appropriate for the study. Data collection is required for interview questions, and data analysis is required for content or thematic analysis. A software tool, such as NVivo, could be beneficial for data analysis.

Conclusions: Qualitative interviews are essential for skill researchers, particularly when probing questions are necessary to ensure that the results effectively address the research questions. An

ethical approval statement is required due to human participation to avoid any ethical issues and conflicts of interest.

Keywords: qualitative research, interviews, content analysis, thematic analysis, semi-structured interview questions, ethical approval statement.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to Qualitative Research

Ever wondered how people truly experience the world? That's where qualitative research comes in! Instead of just crunching numbers, it is about diving deep to understand what things mean to people. Think of it as exploring the stories behind the statistics. Qualitative research is all about context, aiming to understand experiences within their social, cultural, and historical settings.

Qualitative research represents a broad field of inquiry dedicated to understanding human experiences, social processes, and cultural meanings. Unlike quantitative approaches that seek generalizability and statistical precision, qualitative methodologies are designed to capture depth, complexity, and context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through interviews, observations, and document analysis, researchers immerse themselves in participants' lived realities, uncovering patterns of meaning that may not be apparent when viewed solely through numbers.

One of the defining features of qualitative research is its emphasis on context. Rather than isolating variables in controlled settings, qualitative studies aim to situate phenomena within their social, cultural, and historical environments. For example, instead of asking "what percentage of teachers use technology in the classroom," a qualitative researcher might explore "how do teachers experience the integration of digital tools in teaching, and what challenges or opportunities do they encounter?" This shift illustrates the interpretive and exploratory nature of qualitative inquiry.

1.2 The Crucial of Interviews

Among qualitative methods, the interview stands as the most commonly used and widely recognized technique. Interviews provide researchers with the opportunity to access participants'

perspectives in their own words, capturing nuances and richness that surveys or experiments may overlook (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021).

The importance of interviews lies in their flexibility and depth:

- They can be highly structured or entirely conversational.
- They allow participants to expand on issues of personal relevance.
- They facilitate probing into sensitive or complex experiences.

This makes interviews indispensable in fields such as sociology, psychology, education, health research, and organizational studies.

1.3 The Aim of this Article

This article provides a comprehensive exploration of interview strategies in qualitative research. Version 1 emphasizes the practical and applied dimensions of interviewing—how interviews are designed, conducted, and analyzed—while also addressing the philosophical and ethical foundations underpinning them.

The structure of this expanded write-up is as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Philosophical Foundations
3. Types of Interviews
4. Designing the Interview Strategy
5. Conducting the Interview
6. Ethical Considerations
7. Data Analysis and Integration
8. Strengths and Limitations
9. Innovations and Future Directions
10. Conclusion
11. Philosophical Foundations of Interviewing in Qualitative Research
12. Qualitative interviewing is deeply tied to questions of ontology (the nature of reality) and epistemology (the nature of knowledge). Researchers working from a constructivist ontology assume that reality is socially constructed and multiple. Epistemologically, they approach interviews as opportunities to co-construct meaning with participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

13. By contrast, those from a post-positivist orientation may view interviews as a means to approximate reality, acknowledging bias while still aiming for objectivity. The chosen stance influences every aspect of the interview—from question framing to analysis.
14. Interpretivist Foundations
15. Most qualitative interviews are grounded in interpretivism, which holds that understanding human behavior requires grasping the meanings individuals assign to their actions (Schwandt, 2014). From this perspective, interviews are not neutral tools but rather interactive encounters shaped by both the interviewer and the interviewee.
16. For example, when a nurse is asked about patient care, her responses are influenced not only by her experiences but also by the researcher's identity, tone, and framing of questions. Interpretivism thus requires reflexivity and attention to context.
17. Hermeneutics and Phenomenology
18. Hermeneutics emphasizes the interpretation of texts—including spoken narratives. Interviews are thus understood as texts to be interpreted, with attention to both surface meaning and deeper context (Gadamer, 2004).
19. Phenomenology, inspired by Husserl and later expanded by van Manen (2016), aims to uncover the essence of lived experience. Phenomenological interviewing encourages participants to describe experiences in detail—what it felt like, what it meant—rather than just reporting events.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Qualitative Interview Research

According to Kvale (2009), Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009), King & Horrocks (2010), and Kvale & Brinkmann (2021), qualitative interview research can be summarized as follows: it is the predominant format for data collection in qualitative research. A qualitative interview is a context in which practices and norms are not only documented but also attained, contested, and reinforced. All qualitative research interviews possess a degree of structure, typically categorized as semi-structured, lightly structured, or in-depth. Unstructured interviews are typically recommended for long-term fieldwork, as they enable respondents to articulate their thoughts freely and at their own pace, with minimal constraints on their responses. Semi-structured interviews are in-depth interviews in which respondents answer predetermined open-ended questions, and they are extensively utilized by many researchers in their studies. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews are widely used as a format for conducting interviews, which can involve either an individual or a group. These interviews are conducted either individually or in groups, and often last between 30 minutes and an hour or more. Semi-structured interviews rely on a semi-structured interview guide,

which is a schematic outline of questions or subjects to be examined by the interviewer. Interview guidelines facilitate the efficient utilization of interview time by systematically and completely analyzing many respondents while maintaining focus on the intended objectives. The interview guide consists of a primary question and several related inquiries, which are refined by pilot testing of the guide. To collect interview data more effectively, recording the interviews is deemed a suitable option, albeit it can occasionally be contentious between the researcher and the responder. Handwritten notes during the interview are comparatively unreliable, and the researcher may overlook essential details. The interview recording facilitates the researcher's concentration on the topic and linguistic cues, allowing the transcriptionist to produce a "verbatim transcript" of the interview.

2.2 Critical and Feminist Perspectives

Critical theory emphasizes the power dynamics inherent in the interview process. Researchers often hold institutional authority, which can influence how participants respond (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). For example, low-income participants may tailor answers to please a researcher perceived as more privileged.

Feminist perspectives argue for reciprocity, empathy, and collaboration in interviews (Oakley, 1981). Rather than pretending neutrality, feminist researchers embrace the relational nature of interviewing, acknowledging that building rapport can lead to more authentic and empowering exchanges.

2.3 Postmodern and Pragmatic Approaches

Postmodern perspectives question whether interviews capture “truth” at all. They suggest that interviews are performative acts, where participants construct versions of themselves depending on the context (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Pragmatism, meanwhile, takes a more flexible approach: interviews are valuable insofar as they help answer research questions (Patton, 2015). Pragmatists are less concerned with philosophical purity and more with methodological utility, often integrating interviews with surveys or other data sources.

3. TYPE OF QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

3.1 Structured Interviews

Structured interviews are characterized by **standardized questions** asked in the same order to every participant. They resemble surveys but are delivered orally, allowing clarification of misunderstandings.

- **Advantages**: Comparability, reliability, efficiency.
- **Limitations**: Limited depth, rigid structure, potential for missing unexpected insights.

Example: Government agencies may use structured interviews when evaluating public service delivery across large populations.

3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews utilize an interview guide with pre-formulated questions, but allow for flexibility in sequence and wording. This format strikes a balance between comparability and depth (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021).

- **Advantages**: Allows probing and follow-up questions, generates rich data.
- **Limitations**: Requires skilled interviewers, can drift off-topic.

Example: A study exploring teachers' experiences of online learning may begin with general questions about digital tools and then adapt follow-ups to individual responses.

3.3 Unstructured (In-Depth) Interviews

Unstructured interviews are **conversational and flexible**, guided by the participant's responses rather than a fixed script (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

- **Advantages**: Depth, flexibility, participant-led narratives.
- **Limitations**: Time-consuming, difficult to compare across participants, risk of data overload.

Example: Ethnographers often rely on unstructured interviews, allowing participants to set the agenda, such as community elders sharing their oral histories.

3.4 Narrative and Life History Interviews

Narrative interviews emphasize **storytelling**, capturing how individuals construct identity and meaning (Riessman, 2008). Life history interviews extend this to entire life trajectories, linking personal experiences to historical contexts (Plummer, 2001).

Example: Interviewing refugees about their migration journeys provides insight into both their personal experiences and the structural forces, such as policies or conflicts, that influenced their decisions.

3.5 Focused Interviews and Focus Groups

The focused interview, developed by Merton et al. (1990), is designed to study responses to specific stimuli (e.g., a film, advertisement, or event). Focus groups extend this logic to collective settings, enabling discussion among multiple participants (Morgan, 1997).

Example: Marketing researchers often use focus groups to gauge consumers' reactions to advertisements.

3.6 Expert and Elite Interviews

Expert interviews involve participants with specialized knowledge, such as policymakers or industry leaders (Bogner et al., 2009). Elite interviews go further, engaging high-profile individuals such as CEOs or political leaders (Harvey, 2011).

- Advantages: Access to strategic insights, valuable contextual knowledge.
- Limitations: Scheduling difficulties, potential guardedness of elites.

3.7 Ethnographic and Informal Interviews

- In ethnography, interviews are often informal and situated within fieldwork (Spradley, 1979). They may occur spontaneously and seamlessly integrate into daily life.
- Example: A researcher studying street vendors might conduct casual conversations during transactions to gather authentic insights.

4. RESULTS: Designing the Interview Strategy

4.1 Linking Research Questions and Interview Design

The foundation of an effective interview strategy is a clear articulation of research questions. Interview design must flow logically from what the researcher seeks to understand. Exploratory questions (e.g., *"How do patients describe their interactions with healthcare providers?"*) lend themselves to qualitative interviewing, while predictive or causal questions may be less suitable.

4.2 Sampling Approaches

Interview research typically employs non-probability sampling:

- **Purposive sampling**: Selecting participants who are most knowledgeable or relevant to the study topic.
- **Snowball sampling**: Leveraging participant referrals, useful for hidden or marginalized groups.
- **Maximum variation sampling**: Capturing a wide range of experiences across demographics or contexts.
- **Theoretical sampling**: Common in grounded theory, where sampling evolves as categories emerge (Charmaz, 2014).

4.3 Developing an Interview Guide

An interview guide provides a roadmap without dictating the journey. Effective guides:

- Begin with broad, easy questions to build rapport.
- Progress to more specific or sensitive issues.
- End with reflective or summary questions.

Probes such as *"Can you give me an example?"* or *"What happened next?"* deepen responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

4.4 Pilot Testing and Refinement

Conducting pilot interviews enables researchers to identify unclear questions, adjust the pacing, and test the equipment. Pilot findings should inform revisions before full data collection begins (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

4.5 Practical and Logistical Considerations

Interviews require thoughtful planning:

- **Location**: Neutral and comfortable spaces encourage openness.
- **Duration**: Typically 45–90 minutes, depending on depth.
- **Recording**: Audio or video, with participant permission and backup strategies.
- **Compensation**: Tokens of appreciation may enhance participation but should not coerce.

5. DISCUSSIONS: Conducting the Interview

5.1 Building Rapport and Trust

Rapport is central to successful interviews. Researchers can build trust through active listening, empathetic responses, and respect for cultural norms (King & Horrocks, 2010). Small talk at the beginning often eases participants into the conversation.

5.2 Questioning Techniques

Effective interviewing requires skill in phrasing questions:

- **Open-ended questions** invite elaboration.
- **Follow-up probes** clarify and deepen understanding.
- **Avoid leading questions**, which bias responses.

Example: Instead of asking, *"Were you frustrated with your supervisor?"*, a better prompt is *"How did you feel when your supervisor gave feedback?"*

5.3 Managing Interview Flow

Interviews should balance flexibility with focus. Interviewers must allow participants to steer discussions while gently redirecting when conversations diverge too far from the topic.

5.4 Handling Sensitive Topics

When discussing sensitive issues (e.g., trauma, discrimination), interviewers must demonstrate empathy and be mindful of distress signals. Offering breaks and allowing participants to skip questions are important safeguards (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007).

5.5 Recording, Note-Taking, and Observation

Recording ensures accuracy, but field notes remain crucial for capturing non-verbal cues, atmosphere, and contextual details. For instance, noting a participant's hesitation or tone provides interpretive richness.

5.6 Reflexivity during the Interview

Reflexivity requires interviewers to remain aware of how their own identities, assumptions, and behavior shape the encounter (Finlay, 2002). Reflexive notes immediately after interviews help identify potential biases.

5.7 Ethical Considerations

5.7.1 Informed Consent

Ethics begins before the interview itself. Participants must understand the purpose, risks, and benefits of the study. Informed consent should be both written and verbal, with opportunities to ask questions (Orb et al., 2001)

5.7.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Protecting participants involves the use of pseudonyms, encryption of data, and the careful management of personally identifiable information. Yet in elite interviews, anonymity may be impractical because roles are recognizable (Wiles et al., 2008). Researchers must negotiate disclosure carefully.

5.7.3 Minimizing Harm

Interviews may inadvertently cause distress. Ethical practice requires vigilance and preparedness to pause, stop, or refer participants to support services when needed.

5.7.4 Cultural Sensitivity

Cross-cultural interviews raise issues of translation and interpretation. Temple and Young (2004) emphasize that translation is an interpretive act, not a neutral one. Researchers must be aware of cultural norms related to hierarchy, gender, and communication styles.

5.7.5 Reciprocity and Respect

Feminist perspectives emphasize reciprocity—ensuring participants benefit in some way from the research (Oakley, 1981). This could mean sharing findings, providing feedback, or recognizing contributions.

5.8. Data Analysis and Integration

5.8.1 Transcription

Transcription converts spoken interviews into text for analysis. Decisions about including pauses, tone, or laughter affect interpretation (Poland, 2002). Verbatim transcription captures detail but is resource-intensive, while "cleaned" transcripts enhance readability.

5.8.2 Coding and Theme Development

Analysis typically begins with **coding**, where segments of data are labeled with descriptive or conceptual tags. Approaches include:

- **Thematic analysis**: Identifying recurring themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- **Grounded theory**: Iterative coding to build theory (Charmaz, 2014).
- **IPA**: Exploring lived experiences through meaning-making (Smith et al., 2009).
- **Discourse analysis**: Examining how language constructs social reality (Silverman, 2014).

5.8.3 Reflexivity in Analysis

Researchers' interpretations are influenced by their positionality. Analytic memos and peer debriefing enhance credibility (Finlay, 2002).

5.8.4 Using CAQDAS Software

NVivo, Atlas.ti, and MAXQDA help organize large datasets but do not replace human interpretation (Silver & Lewins, 2014).

5.8.5 Triangulation and Integration

Integrating interviews with other data sources—documents, observations, surveys—enhances trustworthiness through **triangulation** (Patton, 2015)

5.9 Strengths and Limitations of Interview Strategy

5.9.1 Strengths

1. **Depth and Richness**
   Interviews capture detailed accounts that go beyond surface-level responses, allowing researchers to access emotions, values, and cultural meanings.
2. **Flexibility**
   Unlike surveys, interviews adapt to participants' perspectives, allowing the exploration of unexpected but relevant themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021).
3. **Empowerment of Participants**
   Particularly for marginalized groups, interviews can provide a platform for voices often excluded from formal decision-making (Oakley, 1981).
4. **Contextualization**
   Interviews situate experiences within social, cultural, and historical contexts, enabling nuanced interpretation.

5.9.2 Limitations

1. **Time and Resource Intensive**
   Conducting, transcribing, and analyzing interviews requires significant labor.
2. **Potential for Bias**
   Interviewers may unintentionally influence responses through tone, framing, or non-verbal cues.
3. **Ethical Complexities**
   Ensuring confidentiality, handling distress, and managing power dynamics demand careful planning.
4. **Generalizability**
   Because interview samples are small and purposive, findings are not statistically generalizable. Qualitative scholars emphasize **transferability** instead (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
5. **Over-Reliance on Verbal Articulation**
   Interviews privilege participants who are articulate and comfortable expressing themselves verbally, potentially marginalizing others (Pink, 2015)

5.9.3 Innovations and Future Directions

5.9.3.1 Digital and Online Interviewing

Video conferencing platforms, such as Zoom, have become mainstream for conducting qualitative interviews, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic (Archibald et al., 2019). While they increase access and reduce costs, they also pose challenges for rapport building and privacy.

5.9.3.2 Asynchronous Interviewing

Email and messaging-based interviews allow participants to respond at their convenience. This can yield reflective responses but lacks the spontaneity of real-time dialogue (James & Busher, 2012).

5.9.3.3 Multimodal and Creative Approaches

Emerging practices incorporate images, mapping, and storytelling:

- **Photo-elicitation** engages participants in interpreting visual stimuli.
- **Digital storytelling** blends narrative with multimedia.
- **Participatory mapping** captures spatial dimensions of lived experience (Pink, 2015).

5.9.3.4 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI-powered tools assist in transcription and even preliminary coding. However, reliance on AI raises ethical and epistemological concerns: Can algorithms capture nuance? Who controls the data (Brennen, 2023)?

5.9.3.5 Virtual and Augmented Reality

VR/AR technologies allow immersive contexts for interviews, though these are still experimental (Jerald, 2016). For example, participants might “walk through” a virtual environment while narrating experiences.

5.9.3.6 Global South and Decolonial Perspectives

Future innovations must integrate non-Western epistemologies. Indigenous and decolonial approaches emphasize relational accountability, community benefits, and respect for local knowledge traditions (Chilisa, 2012).

6. CONCLUSION

A qualitative interview study is necessary for the introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, conclusion, limitations, and recommendations. The study's context, demographics, and sample methodology are essential. Purposive sampling is generally utilized to guarantee that the respondents are suitable for the research. Data collection is necessary for formulating interview questions, and data analysis is essential for doing content or thematic analysis. A software application, like NVivo, may prove advantageous for data analysis. The qualitative research methodology utilizes data collection and analysis. The initial step involves selecting secondary data to build the study instrument (interview questions). The subsequent phase involves gathering and analyzing data derived from interviews with a suitably sized sample of respondents for the study.

An interview approach for qualitative research is a method for collecting comprehensive, nuanced, and thorough information from a study participant. Qualitative interviews exhibit greater flexibility than formal quantitative interviews and generally incorporate open-ended questions, enabling interviewees to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in their own terms. The objective is to comprehend a phenomenon from the participant's viewpoint. Categories of Qualitative Interviews. There are three primary categories of qualitative interviews: Structured interviews are the most rigid kind, featuring a planned set of questions posed in a specified sequence. They are frequently employed when a researcher seeks to compare replies among participants. Although they provide uniformity, they constrain the profundity and spontaneity of the dialogue.

Semi-structured interviews are the predominant methodology in qualitative research. The researcher employs a predetermined interview guide or protocol that delineates a series of subjects and open-ended inquiries to be addressed. The interviewer possesses the discretion to pose follow-up questions, seek further details, and alter the sequence of inquiries according to the conversational dynamics. This methodology reconciles uniformity with the capacity to investigate unforeseen and intriguing revelations. Unstructured interviews are the most adaptable and are frequently characterized as facilitated dialogues. The researcher possesses a broad topic but lacks a definitive set of inquiries. The objective is to cultivate rapport and allow the participant to guide the story.

This is ideal for examining complex or sensitive themes when a more natural, free-flowing discourse is needed. An effective interview technique encompasses several essential elements, irrespective of the style.

6.1 Summary of Insights

This expanded discussion has illustrated that qualitative interviewing is both a methodological tool and an epistemological stance. Interviews are grounded in diverse philosophical traditions, applied through varied types and strategies, and continually evolving to address ethical, practical, and theoretical challenges.

6.2 The Enduring Value of Interviews

Despite criticisms of subjectivity, resource intensity, and limited generalizability, interviews remain indispensable for exploring lived experiences and social meanings. Their flexibility, richness, and adaptability ensure their continued relevance in qualitative research.

6.3 Looking Ahead

As technology reshapes communication, interviews will increasingly occur online, in multimodal formats, and even in virtual spaces. Zoom and other platforms are revolutionizing the way we communicate. Yet their essence—dialogical engagement between researcher and participant—will remain. The challenge for researchers is to harness innovation while safeguarding ethics, reflexivity, and depth.

6.4 Final Reflection

Despite criticisms and emerging alternatives, interviews remain indispensable for qualitative research. They embody the relational, dialogical, and interpretive heart of enquiry, making them uniquely suited to exploring human experience in all its complexity. As technology and society evolve, interviews will continue to be invented, but their central role in qualitative research methodology is unlikely to diminish.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Preparation

Prior to the interview, the researcher must clearly define the research objectives and questions to effectively recruit suitable participants. A crucial phase is creating an interview guide featuring meticulously formulated, open-ended questions that are clear and free from jargon.

7.2 Establishing Rapport

An essential component of a qualitative interview is ensuring the participant feels at ease and secure. The interviewer must engage in active listening, demonstrating respect and empathy. This fosters trust, motivating the participant to disclose information candidly and sincerely.

7.3 Executing the Interview

The researcher must exhibit adaptability and attentiveness during the interview. Techniques such as probing—inquiring with phrases like "how," "why," or "elaborate on that"—facilitate the extraction of more comprehensive responses. It is also essential to be at ease with quiet, since it provides the person with an opportunity to reflect and elaborate. Interviews are generally audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim, provided the participant has given their consent. The transcription process is crucial for data analysis, since it transforms spoken language into a text document that can be methodically examined for patterns, themes, and insights. Post-Interview Reflection: It is advisable for the researcher to contemplate the proceedings following each interview. This can enhance the interview guide, augment interviewing abilities, and document non-verbal clues or contextual information that would not be recorded in the audio.

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