

The JOURNAL of
EDUCATION
and HUMANITIES

Volume 6 2024-2025



The Journal of Education and Humanities

Faculty of Education and Humanities
University of Guyana

Volume 6 2024-2025



Front Cover Artwork:

Female/La Femelle

Oliver Smith*

2021

Oil on canvas with silicone

3' x 2'

The woman is the mother of all, a lifegiver, a wife. She exudes energy and gives of her light.

*Oliver Smith is a graduate of the Faculty of Education and Humanities' programme (2021) and of the E.R. Burrowes School of Art. He is an educator and freelance artist who continues to share his passion for art and drive for creativity with students young and old.

ISSN: 2518-2323

The Journal of Education and Humanities

Volume 6

2024-2025

The Journal of Education and Humanities is a double-blind peer-reviewed journal published by the Faculty of Education and Humanities, University of Guyana. All correspondence should be sent to:

**The JEH Editorial Office, Faculty of Education and Humanities, University of
Guyana, Turkeyen**

or

ugjeah@gmail.com

The articles in this journal reflect the personal views and research of the individual authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Faculty of Education and Humanities or the University of Guyana.

©Copyright: The Journal of Education and Humanities 2025. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted, or disseminated in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission from the Faculty of Education and Humanities, University of Guyana.

The Journal of Education and Humanities

Faculty of Education and Humanities
University of Guyana

Volume 6

Editors

Alim Hosein
University of Guyana

Tamirand Nnena De Lisser
University of Guyana

Romona Bennett
University of Guyana

Abigail Persaud Cheddie
University of Guyana

The Journal of Education and Humanities

Faculty of Education and Humanities
University of Guyana

Contents

<u>Dean's Foreword</u>	Page 1
<u>Estherine Adams</u> <u>The Two Deaths of John Klass of British Guiana and the Post-Mortem Dehumanization of Enslaved People</u>	Page 3
<u>Shammane Joseph</u> <u>The First Women Police (1953): A Critical Analysis of Gender, Power, and Institutional Change</u>	Page 18
<u>Romona Bennett</u> <u>The Indigenous Woman and Sex Work in Jan Carew's <i>The Wild Coast</i></u>	Page 30
<u>Mark Mc Gowan</u> <u>Experimenting with Ungrading in the English Service Courses at the University of Guyana</u>	Page 51
<u>Gentian Miller</u> <u>A Tribute to Professor Loncke (2021), A Selection of Poems from <i>Bone Flute Music</i>, & A Reflective Essay</u>	Page 75
<u>Elsa Cromarty Hosein</u> <u>Investigating Vocabulary Approaches Within the Context of Reading Comprehension: Insights Into Teachers' Instructional Practices at the Primary Level</u>	Page 83
<u>Lydia Narain</u> <u>Administrative Leadership during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Organizational Accomplishments: Perspectives of Teachers at a Secondary School in Guyana</u>	Page 100
<u>Pamela Rose</u> <u>Research Supervisors' Perceptions of a Bachelor of Education Research Programme at the University of Guyana</u>	Page 126

Dean's Foreword

When I began the journey of building my research and publication profile, *The Journal of Education and Humanities (JEH)*, Volume 1, Number 1, published January 2008, offered that stepping stone. My 2008 *JEH* article “We Have Voices Too: Issues on listening to the youngest members of our society” remains one of my prides. That publication set the stage for the development of my skills and competencies in professional communication to advance scientific knowledge and improve Early Childhood Programming in Guyana. Mr. Alim Hosein, long-standing member of the editorial team, reviewed that submission. His review was thorough. As a young lecturer, I thought the review was brutal. After meeting with Alim, I went, as the saying goes, “straight home”. I went straight home to recover from the shock of the magnitude of revisions. A few moments later, I played one of my favourite tracks, “Donna Summer” (I have tracks for different emotional states), pulled myself together, and began the revisions that led to publication.

The JEH remains that space to support the work of the Faculty of Education and Humanities (FEH) at the University of Guyana (UG) in achieving its mission through research, the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge. *The JEH* remains an inspiration, especially to our junior researchers. The contributions in this sixth volume showcase provocative research of eight authors on critical issues in history, literature, languages, and educational leadership, offering insights that contribute to academic discourse, spark interest, and generate debate. This volume demonstrates that our staff are at the leading edge of their research and thinking, and have established themselves as quality specialists in their fields, responding to and mitigating national, regional, and international challenges.

The underlying themes at the heart of this volume begin with the historical realisation and meaning-making by three authors of the injustices faced by enslaved people in British Guiana, the pioneering role and struggles of women in the British Guiana Police Force, and the racialised and sexualised portrayal of Indigenous women in Caribbean literature. These pieces, though highly innovative, may be uncomfortable for those who have been

affected by, or are currently affected by, cultural appropriation and other power imbalances in Guyanese and Caribbean societies. They mark a giant step in the FEH's research agenda to deepen contextual knowledge of the shaping of the nation. Shifting to contemporary challenges in higher education, three other authors offer enriching contributions on literature and language teaching practices to enhance student learning and reduce stress, close gaps in teaching practices to improve reading comprehension, and overcome challenges in crafting meaningful poetry. The volume closes with directions for a process of change through strong leadership, exemplified by practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, and by impactful research supervision to improve outcomes. Together, the authors' work advances knowledge and practices that benefit both academia and society, and provides frameworks through which policy decisions and programme outcomes could be realised.

Congratulations to the authors, and gratitude to the editors of *The JEH* Volume 6: Alim Hosein, Tamirand Nnena De Lisser, Romona Bennett, and Abigail Persaud Cheddie. I hope this volume inspires meaningful dialogue and action for a better, beautiful future.

Michelle Semple-McBean

**The Two Deaths of John Klass of British Guiana and the Post-Mortem
Dehumanization of Enslaved People**

Estherine Adams

Abstract

This article explores John Klass's death while in state custody, the many layers of violence it epitomized, and the subsequent efforts to continue to dehumanize him after his demise. Using the fragments from archival records – such as the inquest into his death – I suggest that John Klass, born once, died twice. His physical death was occasioned through violence inflicted upon him on the treadmill at the Georgetown jail, and his second death or postmortem dehumanization continued at the inquest, where dishonour and degradation ensued. I suggest that this was done in an effort to maintain the legitimacy of the newly installed treadmill, which essentially replaced the whip as the main form of punishment for enslaved people.

Keywords: British Guiana, amelioration, treadmill, punishment, slavery

On May 1st, 1826, just after midday, John Klass died at the Georgetown Prison in British Guiana. Officials ruled his death accidental, occasioned by a “fracture of the skull with concufision [sic] and some effusion of blood” (Medical Examiner Report, CO 111/54). John Klass was the first person to die on the newly installed treadmill in the colony's jail. Whether it was the nature of his death or the political climate suffusing the mother country and the colony at the time, his death caused enough disquiet that an official inquest was ordered. The Governor, Sir Benjamin D'Urban, conveyed the inquest findings to the Secretary of State of the Colonies in a letter dated May 11, 1826. He ruled the death an accident and concluded that it was “the death of a man through his own violence,” and that no officials were to be blamed (D'Urban to Bathurst, CO111/54). The official response suggests that John Klass was perhaps a person of high social standing in colonial society. In fact, Klass was an enslaved man, making the reaction to his death seemingly unorthodox for a colonial slave society.

From the point of capture to the point of death, and often transcending death, enslaved people experienced iterations of violence. It was in the enslaver's interest to care for the enslaved, but their disproportionate representation in the population gave rise to a

combination of state, systemic, physical, and psychological violence. As Fuentes (2016) observes, sometimes the enslaved “succumbed to the violence inflicted on them,” because of its severity or because their living and working conditions rendered them too weak to survive (p. 6).

Similarly, the dehumanization of enslaved people began from the point of capture in Africa and continued throughout every stage of their enslavement. The manner in which the captives were acquired, marched to the shores, branded, and packed aboard slave ships, stripped of their identity and everything familiar, to the way they were sold at auction, worked on plantations, and died, displayed their dehumanization. This dehumanization continued after the enslaved died and, as in the case of John Klass, was used to justify their death.

This article explores John Klass’s death while in state custody, the many layers of violence it epitomized, and the subsequent efforts to continue to dehumanize him after his demise. Using the fragments from archival records – such as the inquest into his death – I suggest that John Klass, born once, died twice. His physical death was occasioned through violence inflicted upon him on the treadmill at the Georgetown jail, and his postmortem dehumanization, or “social death,” to co-opt Orlando Patterson’s important terminology, continued at the inquest, where dishonour and degradation ensued. I posit that this was done in an effort to maintain the legitimacy of state-controlled punishment through the newly installed treadmill, which essentially replaced the whip as the main form of punishment for enslaved people (Patterson, 1982). I examine the complexities of these deaths in the context of the British Anti-Slavery movement’s impact on colonial punishment reforms and the transfer of power to punish from the private to the public/state sphere, even as slave owners knew that their control rested on violence.

The enslaved man, John Klass, belonged to Charles Herbert of Plantation Klein Pouderoyen, which was situated on the West Bank of the Demerara River in British Guiana. It was one of the larger coffee estates, and while the majority of cotton and coffee estates in the colony shifted to sugar cultivation after the British re-conquest in 1803, Plantation Klein Pouderoyen remained a coffee estate (Rodney, 1979; CO 111/54). For enslaved people on plantations that transitioned, the labour conditions deteriorated, and overwork became more pronounced. In 1824, the Abolitionist James Stephen noted that

slave conditions in British Guiana and Trinidad represented the extremes of the system. On a typical coffee plantation like Klein Pouderoyen, the enslaved people lived alone or in “barrack” conditions, with a high rate of natural decrease and a high proportion of female-headed families owing to the practice of separating families for sale (Craton, 1997, p. 235). These were the conditions that Klass existed in before his demise.

We may never know the full extent of Klass’s family dynamics because enslaved people were not allowed to maintain their African identity, and because the plantation owners did not deem it necessary to record these details of the lives of the enslaved beyond what was beneficial to them. We can deduce, however, that his mother probably headed one of these households on Plantation Klein, Pouderoyen, where she was also enslaved, and that he probably resided with his mother, as children of enslaved women took their mother’s status.

From the records presented at the inquest into his death, Klass appeared to be in good physical health at the time of his death. The plantation manager described him as a man of “robust health and very powerful,” anecdotally recalling “about two months [before his death] he lift[ed] up a bag of coffee in each arm weighing each 150 lbs” (Doofy, CO111/54). The three state doctors appointed to examine his body postmortem concurred that Klass “appeared to be a very fine strong healthy subject and a remarkably fine figure of a negro” (Gill, Weberton and Clifton CO 111/54). The suggestion here is that Klass was within the prime working age range for enslaved individuals, generally between twenty and forty years old, making him a valuable asset to his enslaver due to his capacity for labour.

In April 1826, a local magistrate found Klass guilty of allegedly “beating his mother” and “knocking down two Drivers” on the plantation (Doofy, CO111/54). What is peculiar is that this statement did not come from the magistrate’s report, but from the jailer’s testimony. When the Governor sent the first official correspondence detailing the events surrounding the enslaved man’s death to the Secretary of State, he made no mention of Klass’s “crime” (D’Urban to Bathurst). Further questions emerged as Michael Thompson, the jailer, who presented two sworn statements of the incident, only mentioned the “crime” in his second statement, which he presented about ten days after the incident (Thompson, CO111/54). The governor and jailer's failure to present such potentially

incriminating evidence raises serious concerns about their motives and the veracity of the narrative. It is highly improbable that they would knowingly disregard an opportunity to strengthen their case. The possibility of collusion and fabrication of this crime after the event by plantation and state officials is plausible, given their historically aligned interests.

Whatever the state of his innocence or guilt, the magistrate sentenced Klass to one month's punishment on the treadmill at the Georgetown jail. The Court of Policy, the colony's legislative body, approved the use of a "one horse power mill" beginning in March 1826 (CO 111/54). This penal reform stemmed from two interrelated influences: anti-slavery agitation and the 1823 Demerara Revolt. Pressured by the Anti-Slavery Society, the British Government experimented with amelioration policies in which it sought to reform slavery gradually through new laws meant to improve slave treatment (Brereton, 2006; Mathieson, 1926; Green, 1976). The new laws banned female flogging and restricted the number of lashes a male could receive to twenty-five, but outlined alternative forms of punishment, from solitary confinement – with or without work – to wearing distinguishing dress and marks. These changes, illustrating the major ways that the British Government tried to regulate physical violence perpetrated against the enslaved, drew the ire of the plantocracy and partly inspired the 1823 Demerara Revolt (DaCosta, 1994; Sheridan, 2002; St. Pierre, 2007).

The revolt reinforced the planters' argument of the "dangers" of the proposals and the need for violence to assert their authority. It is partly in this context that the colonial authorities erected a treadmill in the Georgetown jail in March 1826. Nineteenth-century penal treadmills resembled large, wide wheels fitted with steps that prisoners would climb repeatedly, causing the entire wheel to rotate. Some treadmills, like the one in the Georgetown jail, were fitted with hand-held bars for support and were large enough to allow several persons to climb at once (BBC, n.d.). Its use as an instrument of correction was legally recognized in Article 14 of the Ordinance for the Religious Instruction of Slaves (Beard, 1826). Abolitionists endorsed the implementation of the treadmill as a symbol of a new and more civilized penal regime. Unlike flogging, which was private and difficult to regulate, the treadmill was public, supposedly non-violent, and allowed the state rather than plantation authorities to regulate punishment (Browne, 2017, p. 62). Two months later, the mill claimed its first victim, John Klass, and, I suggest, an orchestrated

plan, his second death, was implemented to justify his first death to maintain the legitimacy of this instrument of punishment.

The choice to utilize the jail instead of the plantation as a site of punishment for an enslaved man presents an intriguing historical anomaly. While the law prohibited the flogging of enslaved women, it only restricted the flogging of enslaved men to twenty-five lashes, thus enslaved men could still be flogged on the plantation for any infraction. Owners of enslaved people favoured the spectacle of public punishment since, in slave societies, punishment transcended mere retribution for individual offenses. It served as a potent deterrent, designed to discourage other enslaved individuals from challenging the established power dynamics. Slaveholders viewed terrorizing the enslaved as essential to keeping them docile and maintaining their control over the disproportionately larger population.

The advantages that enslavers or their representatives had suggested were that the plantation was the ideal site to inflict punishment on any enslaved person. Slaveholders generally preferred to punish the enslaved on their private plantations, as flogging allowed labourers to immediately return to work, while imprisonment interrupted their work schedule (Merritt, 2016). On the plantation, they controlled the punishment, they had a larger audience, and it was certainly more convenient.

Plantation Klein Pouderoyen and the Georgetown jail are located on opposite banks of the 6.4-kilometer-wide Demerara River. Traveling to the Georgetown jail required a 14-mile trek, including crossing the river with some form of personal transportation, as it was not until 1828 that a public steam ferry system was established to ply the Demerara River. Taking an enslaved man to jail for punishment meant the plantation owners yielded control to the state, had a smaller audience, and invested considerable resources in traveling to the jail. It is plausible that the novelty of the treadmill or the psychological effect the fear of the unknown potentially had on the enslaved prompted the plantation owner to surrender his authority over his property to the state (Paton, 2022).

On May 1, 1826, John Klass, escorted by his manager and two drivers from the plantation, arrived at the Georgetown jail to commence his punishment on the treadmill. Not intending to squander any opportunity to assert his control, the manager requested that Klass immediately be “put on the mill” (Doofy, CO111/54). There began the violence that

ultimately culminated in Klass's death. Violence, as Vidal (2020) notes, was "intrinsic to chattel slavery in the New World, and within slave societies in particular. It was a daily reality within every economic unit relying on slave labour, although the intensity of it varied in time and space" (p. 40).

The inquest testimonies paint a deeply troubling picture of the violence leading to John Klass's death. The tendered testimonies suggest Klass, in a predictable reaction, resisted his punishment. In his report of the incident, Michael Thompson, the jailer, stated that it was only through a combination of "persuasion" and "threats" that a reluctant Klass began his punishment (Thompson, CO111/54). He was instructed to climb onto the wheel and hold the bar above it as he treaded for periods of fifteen minutes. This method of working the mill was not sustainable; as historian Paton (2022) asserts, the mills were impossible to operate in such a manner (p. 112). According to the jailer, in the first half hour of his punishment, Klass threw himself off the mill four times. The first three times he fell into the "pit," an area filled with sawdust below the mill used to cushion the fall of prisoners. The presence of a "pit" in and of itself suggests that prisoners frequently jumped or fell from the mill. Responding to Klass's actions after his fourth "jump," Thompson increased the level of coercion, ordering Klass to be flogged and physically secured to the rail above the wheel to continue his punishment (Thompson, CO111/54).

The severity of Klass's physical limitations compared with his active resistance to the treadmill punishment becomes increasingly apparent at this point of his ordeal. The jailer's report shows that after he was secured to the mill a fifth time, undoubtedly injured and exhausted, "his feet gave away," and he was bodily removed from the treadmill. Thompson examined Klass for signs of life, noting he "found his pulse was weak," and immediately went to alert the physician. Upon Thompson's return, John Klass had tragically succumbed to his injuries, suffering his first death (Thompson, CO111/54). Despite the circumstances, the Medical Examiner concluded that the death was accidental.

John Klass died undergoing what should have been a routine punishment. The regulations governing the operation of the treadmill at the jail outlined specific guidelines for its use. However, jail authorities demonstrably violated several of these regulations. For instance, they permitted an excessive number of prisoners to utilize the treadmill simultaneously, as approximately fourteen persons were undergoing punishment on a

treadmill designed to accommodate ten. The jailer also failed to obtain a medical evaluation from a physician to assess Klass's fitness before allowing him to be placed on the device, as the regulations for the use of the mill instructed. Furthermore, the jailer inflicted corporal punishment on Klass for failing to remain on the treadmill, subsequently restraining him to the device to prevent further escape attempts (Medical Examiner's Report, CO111/54).

The responsibility for this death in state custody extends beyond the immediate actions of the jailer. The plantation owner and manager, as well as colonial authorities, all played a role in creating and perpetuating the conditions that led to this tragic outcome. The reformer's attempt to reduce violence by modifying corporal punishment failed as one instrument of violence – the whip – was replaced by another technique of torture, the treadmill. In theory, the treadmill seemed the perfect solution for punishment since it was mechanical but inflicted a comparable level of violence on persons sentenced to be punished. In practice, the treadmill was a “brutal instrument of torture” that joined, not replaced, other forms of physical violence. In this sense, the jail became a site for scenes of terror that equalled those on any plantation and the events that unfolded which resulted in Klass's second death were orchestrated to maintain this failed attempt at ameliorating punishment (Brown, 2009, p. 64). The death of an enslaved man could not be allowed to alter the trajectory of punishment in slave society.

Following his physical demise, John Klass experienced continued dehumanization, “social death,” marking a second, and arguably, more symbolic death within a slave society, as in the events that followed, the “imprintable and ... disposable status” of Klass became evident (Patterson, 1982, p. 7). Patterson (1982), in his pathbreaking work, *Slavery and Social Death*, conceived social death as the condition where individuals are not considered fully human and are excluded from the full spectrum of human rights, privileges, and social acceptance within a given society. This exclusion, he argued, can manifest in various forms, including denial of agency, dignity, and even basic humanity. Elaborating, he noted that individuals experiencing social death are often marginalized and stripped of their inherent worth, leading to feelings of isolation, powerlessness, and dehumanization (p. 13).

As Patterson (1982) delineates in sociological terms the death of social personhood and the reincorporation of individuals into slavery, I suggest an extension of this social

death theory beyond a general description of how lives were destroyed and “slaves” were born to demonstrate the continued destruction of enslaved people’s afterlives. Even in death, as John Klass’s case demonstrates, the enslaved continued to be dehumanized and their memory tarnished. This undoubtedly had profound psychological and social consequences on their surviving loved ones, impacting their well-being and their ability to fully participate in the precarious slave society (C. Brown, 2009).

Slavery itself, as Painter (2006) has shown, was a dehumanizing institution, and the dehumanization of enslaved people was a constant part of their lives. Assaults on their bodies and minds exposed them to trauma that was both physical and psychological. Klass’s second symbolic death was enacted through dehumanization, vilification, and assassination of the character of the deceased. These were common currency in the British slave colonies, for discrediting the victim was a way to disprove accusations.

One of the myriad ways enslavers degraded and dehumanized enslaved people was by comparing them to animals. This was in part rooted in perceptions of the nature of Africans and by equating blackness with “brutishness” and “savagery,” which then pervaded the narratives and sought to delegitimize and dehumanize Africans and deflect attention away from any grievances that they might have, thereby dismissing their agency. Character assassination and association of blackness and savagery have justified the killings and brutalization of enslaved people, and even more recently, of persons of African descent.

Beckles (1999) contends that the use of “dehumanizing animal analogies and demonization references to blacks were common” in slave societies and was even enshrined in the law (p. 24). The preamble to the 1661 Slave Laws of Barbados which served as the foundation for slave laws throughout the British North American and Caribbean empire, described blacks as “heathenish,” “brutish,” and a “dangerous kind of people,” while the 1688 Code described blacks as “of a barbarous, wild and savage nature” (Beckles, 1999; Rugemer, 2013). Dehumanization through animalization, as Davis (2014) argues, was a central aspect of slavery from its inception, where whites projected onto blacks unwanted “animal” traits and attributes that enhanced the whites’ sense of being rational, self-disciplined, and ambitious people. The British-born planter and historian Edward Long (1774), in his *History of Jamaica*, perpetuated this narrative, concluding that

Blacks bore a much closer resemblance to apes than to white people and thought they were brutish, ignorant, thievish, crafty, and devourers of human flesh (pp. 363, 376). Enslaved people were so often classed as non-people and denied those basic rights that distinguished humans from lesser creatures, that it stripped them of humanity and rendered them dehumanized “black brutes” (Smith, 1893, p. 181; Breckinridge, 1900, p. 174). They were for all intents and purposes, socially dead (Patterson, 1982; V. Brown, 2008; Králová, 2015).

In like manner, authorities dehumanized and animalized Klass’s post-mortem to conceal systemic violence and complicity in his physical death to safeguard the precarious transfer of the power to punish from the planter class to the state and to ensure the continuation of state-controlled punishment of enslaved people. This “black brute” trope emerged in Klass’s alleged crime. That the jailer belatedly accused him of the heinous crime, violence against his own mother, was not accidental; it was systemic. The jailer’s implication was that a human being would never be violent against the person who birthed them. He did this even as the system of slavery itself legally dehumanized the enslaved, classing them as the chattel of autonomous slaveholders without protection.

To further strengthen this post-mortem vilification of John Klass, two drivers, the plantation manager, and a free man of colour who worked in the jail were called as witnesses for the state. It is noteworthy that none of the other persons punished on the treadmill alongside Klass were called to testify. The head driver, “who marked X as one who cannot write,” allegedly presented his sworn statement thus: “I know John Klass deceased [.] [H]e was [a] violent man[.] [He] does not care for white man [,] driver or even his own mother” (Head Driver, CO111/54). Damon, identified as the second driver of the estate, swore he knew “John Klass who is dead[.] I saw him beating his mother on Saturday last[.] He was a quarrelsome fellow [who] does not care for white or black” (Second Driver, CO111/54). The similar, almost orchestrated tone of these statements brings their veracity into question. While they perhaps acted in their own self-interest, authorities could just as easily coerce the drivers’ testimony through punishment or extortion.

These testimonies suffer from all the usual problems that are associated with documents that are produced under duress. The enslaved people had every reason to distort, omit, or lie in their answers because their lives depended on it. Additionally, it is difficult

to know how to read these words because written testimony does not allow us to interpret the silences and hesitations and the other nuances that can help us determine when someone is telling the truth. Despite these important caveats, these testimonies provide a first-hand view of the machinations that went into place to justify the death of this enslaved man.

The colonial government's decision to select drivers as witnesses in this case demonstrates a deliberate and strategic approach. Drivers were trapped in a rigid dichotomy in slave society between the enslaver and their fellow enslaved. On the one hand, drivers formed part of the slave elite of the plantation. This position allowed them power and privileges other enslaved people did not have, and consequently, they had less to gain by agreeing with the enslaved people among whom they lived. On the other hand, supporting the plantocracy that had appointed them was the driver's best means of maintaining authority. Drivers who fell in disfavour with managers could easily be demoted to field labour (Browne, 2024, p. 98). Ergo, they were more likely to be coerced to provide damaging testimony.

Furthermore, both drivers signed their statements tendered at the inquest with an X indicating that they were illiterate. This suggests the answers these enslaved witnesses provided were mediated by the European scribe who translated Creole into English and sometimes summarized what the enslaved people said. In the given circumstances, it is plausible that the recorded testimony could have been misrepresented as the enslaved could not challenge the written word, and it was in the best interest of the authority to present the testimony in this manner. Whether accurate or not, using his fellow enslaved to dehumanize Klass rendered him undeserving of compassion and perhaps deserving of death.

Efforts to ensure John Klass's second death continued in the plantation manager's Doofy's deposition. The manager swore that in the "five and one-half years" he knew him, Klass was "a most violent tempered and very powerful man perhaps the most powerful man on the estate." He likely referenced alleged former behaviour to justify the present brutality, perhaps even attempting to rationalize his employer's use of the state's punishment system. Doofy sought to reinforce the argument that Klass's injuries were self-inflicted, resulting from him throwing himself off the mill with considerable force. He stressed witnessing Thompson secure Klass to the treadmill, which Klass "with one jerk

br[oke] the ropes and threw himself back,” suggesting he was responsible for his ensuing injuries and death (Doofy, CO111/54).

The animalization of Klass continued in the testimony of William Steel, a free black driver working the prison treadmill, who offered the final official statement pertaining to the events surrounding Klass’s demise. Besides corroborating the previous testimonies, he added that Klass “bit at one of the people who assisted in getting him up” after his fourth fall (Steel, CO111/54). This particular detail from Steel calls his testimony into question since none of the other eyewitnesses mentioned this seemingly crucial piece of information, nor did the alleged victim of the bite testify. It, therefore, seems to be a further attempt to justify Klass’s death by animalizing him. Biting likened him to an animal and erased any sense of compassion for the misery he suffered in his final hours. These testimonies rendered him socially dead, undeserving of sorrow and empathy.

On May 1, 1826, John Klass became the first man, enslaved or free, to die on the newly installed treadmill. His death was officially declared an accident through his negligence, and those in authority were cleared of any wrongdoing. The events of the day, though, leave us with more questions than answers and paint a vivid picture of the violent deaths of John Klass. The local authorities went to extreme lengths to malign Klass after his death when the demise of enslaved people did not usually warrant a reaction from the authorities because of two interconnected reasons. On the one hand, it centres on the emergence of the treadmill as the new form of punishment in a bid to prolong the system of slavery, and on the other, it centres on the fact that Klass died while in state custody. Thus, if the state was found liable for his death, it would have undermined their arguments that the treadmill was a more ameliorative form of punishment for enslaved people and that punishment, in general, should be within the ambit of the state where it could be properly regulated.

But the treadmill did not reduce the level of physical violence inflicted upon the enslaved, as John Klass’s death emphasized. It suggests that one instrument of violence replaced the other. Klass’s owner’s willingness to transfer his authority to punish his enslaved to the state suggests the novelty of the mill possibly excited him or that the fear of the unknown reinforced his control over his chattel. Klass’s inability to cope with his punishment, exacerbated by the many operational violations in the jail on May 1, resulted

in his physical death. The concerted efforts to animalize and dehumanize him postmortem occasioned his second death.

Although the two deaths of John Klass may seem inconsequential, they, in fact, are crucial in understanding the post-mortem vilification of persons of African descent, especially those who die at the hands of authority figures today. Klass's death establishes a longer history of efforts to make blacks complicit in their own deaths by using the language of criminality and reinforcing the brute caricature that portrays black people as innately savage, animalistic, destructive, and criminal – deserving punishment, maybe death.

This historical framework remains critically relevant today, as similar mechanisms of racialized violence and dehumanization persist in shaping modern narratives about Black lives. The “second death” – a process of erasure or vilification that denies the victim's humanity and shifts blame onto them – continues to manifest in contemporary cases of police brutality and state-sanctioned violence. By drawing clearer connections between Klass's case and present-day incidents, we can better understand how victim-blaming and the criminalization of Blackness endure as tools to legitimize systemic violence. This analysis underscores the urgent need to confront and dismantle the enduring practices that perpetuate racial injustice and dehumanization, ensuring that the lives and deaths of individuals like John Klass are not relegated to obscurity but instead serve as catalysts for meaningful change.

References

- BBC. (n.d.). *Free thinking - The dark history of the Treadmill*. BBC Radio 4.
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4w8bVrKRqQDP4fKl0b8XzdW/the-dark-history-of-the-treadmill>
- Beard, H. & Berbice (1826). *An Ordinance for Promoting the Religious Instruction and Bettering the State and Condition of the Slave Population in His Majesty's Colony On Berbice*.
- Beckles, H. (1999). *Centering Woman: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Breckinridge, C. R. (1900). Speech of the Honorable Clifton R. Breckinridge: In Southern Society for the Promotion of the Study of Race Conditions and

- Problems in the South, *Race Problems of the South: Report of the proceedings of the first annual conference held under the auspices of the Southern Society for the Promotion of the Study of Race Conditions and Problems in the South, at Montgomery, Alabama, May 8, 9, 10, A.D. 1900*. Richmond, VA: B. F. Johnson Pub. Co.
- Brereton, B. (2006). *Amelioration*. Encyclopedia of African American Culture and History, Vol. 1.
- Brown, V. (2008). *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Brown, V. (2009). "Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery," *The American Historical Review*, 114:5, 1231–1249.
- Browne, R. (2024). *The Driver's Story Labor and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Browne, R. M. (2017). *Surviving Slavery in the British Caribbean*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- CO 111/54, Letter from Governor Benjamin D'Urban to Secretary of State of the Colonies Lord Bathurst, (NAL).
- CO 111/54, Medical Examiner Report, 1 May 1826, National Archives London.
- CO 111/54, Regulations for the Treadmill, Erected in the Colony-Jail of Demerary and Essequibo, as a Means of Correctional Punishment.
- CO 111/54, Sworn Statement of C.L.J. Doofy, Manager, Plantation Klein Pouderoyen, 1 May 1826.
- CO 111/54, Sworn Statement of Damon, Second Driver Plantation Klein Pouderoyen, May 2, 1826.
- CO 111/54, Sworn Statement of James Gill, Dr. Webotter, Dr. Clifton, May 1, 1826.
- CO 111/54, Sworn Statement of Michael Thompson, Jailer, Georgetown Jail, 1 May 1826.
- CO 111/54, Sworn Statement of the Head Driver Plantation Klein Pouderoyen, May 2, 1826,
- CO 111/54, Sworn Statement of William Steel, Treadmill Driver, May 2, 1826.
- Craton, M. (1997). *Empire, Enslavement, and Freedom in the Caribbean*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle.

- Da Costa, E. V. (1994). *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Davis, D. B. (2014), *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*. New York: Knopf.
- Fuentes, M. J. (2016). *Dispossessed Lives Enslaved Women, Violence and the Archive*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Green, W. A. (1976). *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment 1830-1865*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Králová, J. (2015). "What is social death?", *Contemporary Social Science*, 10:3, 235-248.
- Long, E. (1774). *History of Jamaica or General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of That Island. Three Volumes*. London: T. Lownder.
- Mathieson, W. L. (1926). *British Slavery and its Abolition, 1823-1838*. London: Longmans, Green and co. ltd.
- Merritt, K. L. (2016). "Private, Public, and Vigilante Violence in Slave Societies, Part 2," *Black Perspectives*.
- Painter, N. I. (2006). *Creating Black Americans African American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Paton, D. (2022). "Afterword - Punishment, Slavery and Legitimacy," *Journal of Global Slavery*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 203-209.
- Patterson, O. (1982). *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Rodney, W. (1979). *Guyanese Sugar Plantations in the Late Nineteenth Century a Contemporary Description from the Argosy*. Georgetown: Release Publishers.
- Rugemer, E. B. (2013). "The Development of Mastery and Race in the Comprehensive Slave Codes of the Greater Caribbean during the Seventeenth Century," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 70:3, 429-458.
- Sheridan, R. B. (2002). "The condition of the Slaves on the Sugar Plantations of Sir John Gladstone in the Colony of Demerara, 1812-49. *Nwig*, 76:3&4, 243-69.

Smith, C.H. (1893). "Have Negroes too much liberty?" *Forum*, XVI.

St. Pierre, M. (2007). "The 1823 Guyana Slave Rebellion: A Collective Action Reconsideration." *The Journal of Caribbean History*, 41:1/2, 142-IX.

Vidal, C. (2020). "Violence, Slavery and Race in Early English and French America." In: Antony R, Carroll S, Pennock CD, eds. *The Cambridge World History of Violence*. The Cambridge World History of Violence. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dr. Estherine Adams is a University of Guyana lecturer and head of the Department of History and Caribbean Studies. Her research interests centre on the 18th- and 19th-century Atlantic World, British Guiana, the British Colonial Caribbean, and the prisons in British Guiana, with an emphasis on women and gender. She has published several articles and has worked on several projects, including the Leicester University project 'History of the Georgetown Jail' and the British Academy grant project 'History and Security Sector Reform'.

The First Women Police (1953): A Critical Analysis of Gender, Power, and Institutional Change

Shammane Joseph

Abstract

This article critically explores the introduction of women into the British Guiana Police Force (BGPF) in 1953, examining the intricate links between gender, authority, and institutional reforms. It details the transition from informal roles as “turnkeys” – women undertaking supportive tasks like escorting and supervising female prisoners – to the official recruitment of the first twelve female officers. Positioned within the broader context of universal suffrage, nationalist movements, and colonial resistance to gender equality, the article analyses policies, media responses, and internal opposition within the Force. It reveals how early women officers were marginalized and exploited as tools, often tasked with “moral policing” and denied equal power. Nonetheless, trailblazers such as Sergeant Li and Elsa Yorrick contributed significantly, establishing the groundwork for reforms. The study underscores the ongoing fight for gender equality and recognizes women’s vital contributions to Guyana’s law enforcement history.

Keywords: Women Police, British Guiana Police Force, Colonial Policing, Institutional Resistance, Feminist Historiography

The Turnkeys: Early Female Participation in Law Enforcement

The inclusion of women in the British Guiana Police Force (BGPF) in 1953 marked a significant moment in the nation’s history, reflecting broader shifts in gender roles and political engagement. However, this transition was not without challenges or conflicts. This article critically examines the journey from the auxiliary roles of ‘turnkeys’ to the formal integration of policewomen, highlighting systemic challenges, institutional resistance, and their ongoing struggle for equality.

Before 1953, women were recruited into the British Guiana Police Force (BGPF). However, they were not referred to as police officers; instead, they were called ‘turnkeys’. The responsibilities of the turnkeys included arresting female suspects and escorting them to police stations (Campbell, 1987). They were generally selected because they were considered ‘suitable women’ by members of various communities nationwide. Some turnkeys were also chosen from among the wives of retired non-commissioned officers, particularly those who retired for medical reasons. The turnkeys lived at rural police stations where no female officers were stationed (“They Can Lock You Up!”, 1970). They

were required to open and close the lockups where female prisoners were held, ensure they received necessary medical care, and perform all other duties related to women in custody. By 1953, 75 turnkeys were stationed at police stations across British Guiana (Campbell, 1987). The turnkey system, however, was fraught with limitations and systemic biases. This system highlights early institutional tokenism, where women were confined to gendered auxiliary tasks such as prisoner care and medical oversight rather than complete policing duties.

Unfortunately, 1953 marked the limited use of turnkey employment at police stations. This decline in turnkey responsibilities was seen as a step toward increased efficiency, as past turnkeys had succumbed to temptation. They were often caught showing favouritism to female prisoners in custody, especially at the Brickdam Police Station. Such an offense was regarded as very serious. In 1979, Josephine Booker, a female turnkey, was charged by her husband, a police sergeant, with disobeying orders. Assistant Inspector General W.C. Haradin attempted to dismiss her from her position (Campbell, 1987). The turnkeys' dismissal for "favouritism", like what happened to Josephine Booker in 1979, underscored the systemic distrust of women in authority and the precariousness of their position.

Notably, several well-known turnkeys were present at Brickdam Police Station, including Jessie Bakker (W17) and Emily McGregor (W18), as well as one at Central Station in New Amsterdam, Hyacinth Bourne (W28). These women provided long and dedicated service to the Force (Campbell, 1987).

Even though the turnkey system officially ended in 1977, many turnkeys remained at police stations in rural and riverine areas, making it difficult to eliminate their presence. The last turnkeys aged out of the system by 1987. By that time, turnkeys were compensated only for searching, escorting, and attending to female prisoners in custody ("They Can Lock You Up!", 1970). Their eventual phase-out reflects shifting gender norms but also highlights the devaluation of women's labour – they were paid only for specific tasks and not afforded equal status.

The First Women Police Officers: A Turning Point in Guyanese Law Enforcement

The introduction of universal suffrage in 1953 and the rise to power of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) marked a transformative moment for women's participation in

public life in British Guiana. For the first time, Guyanese women exercised their right to vote and were represented in parliament, signifying a crucial step in their political enfranchisement. This expansion of democratic rights, combined with the growing militant nationalism among women, created the conditions for a significant milestone: the enlistment of the first twelve women into the Guyana Police Force on August 1, 1953 (“12 Made History”, 1953). This development was more than a symbolic achievement; it reflected broader shifts in decolonial feminist movements, positioning Guyanese women as active agents in the struggle for political and social change.

On April 14, 1953, an advertisement appeared in the *Daily Chronicle* and other local newspapers, inviting applications for six positions as women constables in the British Guiana Police Force. This initiative was perceived as an effort by the colonial administration to modernize the force in alignment with global trends in policing. The then Commissioner of Police, Colonel C. H. Watts, in his inaugural statement on the inclusion of women in the force, emphasized that their primary responsibilities would be as wireless operators and stenographers. He further noted that additional qualifications in these fields would be considered (Harding, 1953, p. 3).

One would have thought this was the end of the matter; however, when the first advertisement appeared, the local newspapers were all up in arms over such an announcement. An article in the *Daily Chronicle* stated the following:

This is rather unfair to the men who worked very hard to maintain their homes and to keep the women folk so well upholstered as they are undoubtedly these days – only to have his teeth knocked down his throat and during the time he is engaged in spitting them out getting himself unceremoniously marched to the nearest police station and not by a policeman in a jeep either – but by some “cute-looking” cop in an uplift. (Strubee, 1953, p. 5)

The article continued:

The only women who are going to apply for this job are unmarried women between ages 30-40, women engaged for more than 30 years, jilted women with a face in the future and a figure of the past, women who have been drawing short money all their lives and mothers-in-law who are forced to work. (Strubee, 1953, p. 5)

It further stated:

This was the age of unreasonable women. If any man had reason to believe that a woman with the law in her hand was going to let a man escape her clutches, he would be convinced before long that, as far as a man's freedom is concerned, female cops are robbers. (Strubee, 1953, p. 5)

The recruitment of women was a remarkable act, as it increased the strength of the BGPF and enhanced the status of women in Guyanese society. Male officers did not take kindly to this move. The new building, which was to house the new female recruits, was burned to the ground. Corporal Simon Albert and Corporal Bradford Asimah were charged with arson ("Two Charged with Arson", 1953). Superintendent of Police James Sinclair requested a transfer after being assigned to oversee the female recruits. The Commissioner of Police refused his transfer request, and he submitted his resignation letter, which was also rejected. He saw the introduction of women police in the BGPF as "an act in futility" (British Guiana Police Force, 1954, p. 13).

According to the *Commissioner of Police Annual Report* (British Guiana Police Force, 1955, pp. 14–16), forty-five police officers from the headquarters of the British Guiana Police Force threatened to strike unless the women recruited under this legislation were assigned to the same working conditions as the men. The police officers felt they would be burdened with extra work once the females needed help to complete their assigned duties. There seemed to be not only female stereotypes that governed this action but also "the fear of a working partnership with the opposite sex" (Witz, 1994, p. 675). The thoughts of these male officers reflected societal anxieties about women's encroachment into traditionally male domains.

In April 1953, months before the first twelve women officers entered the British Guiana Police Force, an article in the *Guyana Sunday Chronicle* stated that, "women must be domesticated before they can tackle any other work outside the home" ("A Career Girl?", 1953, p. 3). It further noted that:

While society is tolerant about varying abilities in job getting, there is one sphere in which it is taken for granted that every woman must be an expert, and that is 'homemaking'. ("A Career Girl?", p. 3)

Struggles for Equality and Institutional Resistance

In September 1953, less than a month after women were first admitted into the police force, the *Daily Chronicle* published an editorial questioning the viability of this development, asking, “Can we as a country afford this experiment?” (“Women Police, Are We Way Over Our Heads”, 1953, p. 2). The following year, the newspaper reinforced its scepticism, asserting that women in the police force were an “extravagant eccentricity” (“Women Police One Year Later”, 1954, p. 4) due to their perceived need for protection from male officers while carrying out their duties.

The criteria for individuals, both women and men, seeking to join the police force in 1953 were as follows: ages 18 to 30, a height of 5 feet 8 inches, and being unmarried. The educational requirements were the same for men and women; however, women were required to know shorthand and typewriting. The Commissioner stressed that sleeping accommodations were also provided for women constables whose homes were outside of Georgetown. They all received free uniforms and medical care (“11 Policewomen Recruits”, 1953).

The recruits’ salary was \$600.00 per month for the first six months, then increased to \$720.00, with annual increments ranging from \$48.00 to \$96.00. Male officers earned higher salaries, despite the intention that the new policewomen’s salary scale would match that of the police officers (“11 Policewomen Recruits”, 1953). The *Commissioner of Police Annual Report* states, “this initial promise of equal pay was not fulfilled, and wage parity was not achieved until 1975” (British Guiana Police Force, 1978, p.23). This delay highlighted the persistent gender inequalities within the institution.

The applications for this first call were only allowed for two weeks. Approximately 500 applicants were received, but only 20 appointments were made. After weeks of sifting and interviews, 13 provisional selections were made, and they had to undergo a medical examination, which many of the women found intrusive and unnecessary. Ultimately, the final selection of only eleven policewomen and a Sergeant was made in July 1953. They were Constables W. I. Dianne Cendrecourt, N. Choy, E. Cox, S. De Souza, S. Harmon, Avril Hartman, J. Mars, C. Taylor, Thijme (only name stated), E. Timothy, D. Wren, and Doreen Li (“11 Policewomen Recruits Enter Barracks”, 1953).

All these officers came from the civil service. The BGPF chose the safer option by selecting only women who already understood how the police force operated. Most of these women had no military experience, but all had relatives in the Force. Misses Thijme, Cendrecourt, Choy, and DeSouza were from the telecommunications department. All these policewomen entered the Kingston depot and completed a six-week training course (“11 Policewomen Recruits Enter Barracks”,1953).

The *Commissioner of Police Annual Report* (British Guiana Police Force, 1958) stated that the letter “W” was placed before their numerals to indicate that they were women officers. For the first time in the Police Force, the sleeping quarters had doors. The first Corporal (promoted from the rank of constable) was W6 Avril Hartman. Woman Police Doreen Li, a Chinese Guyanese woman by birth, was sworn in as a constable and subsequently promoted to Sergeant. Later, she became the first Inspector with the number W12. She is regarded as the first woman police officer to organize a registry in the Commissioner of Police Office and to introduce personnel files. Furthermore, Sergeant Li was formerly a member of the Police Service Commission and was placed in charge of the women’s section of the Force.

The Women Police and Social Change

The overall progress of women in the Force continued amid calls for women’s liberation both locally and internationally. Women in the Force integrated into the mainstream of policing and entered areas traditionally controlled by men. However, despite the official support women police received, they were not granted arrest powers because the existing Police Acts specified that only suitable “men” could serve as arresting officers. This meant that the only legitimate options for women police were to tell people to go home and hope they obeyed, to try to make a citizen’s arrest, or wait for a male Constable to assist them (British Guiana Police Force, 1958).

Soon after the advent of Women Police, the police administration assigned them to search suspects’ homes. According to Police Commissioner Watts, there is no better “searcher than a woman” (British Guiana Police Force, 1958, p. 14). The goal was to have them search houses where prostitution was suspected, thieves might be hiding, or perhaps where women served a summons for child support on the men. It was also argued that the

priority was to establish “a position from which they could ensure change” (British Guiana Police Force, 1955, p. 3). Even so, it was the view of the senior members of the Force that “women must, of necessity, work in the closest cooperation with, and show the staunchest loyalty to their male colleagues (British Guiana Police Force, 1955, p. 10). This approach was believed to secure women a permanent place in police work. Either way, the authorities’ lack of support and outright obstruction led to many women not being promoted.

Nonetheless, the women police proved their worth over the years. Providing a protective and supportive presence for women and their families was a positive help in many situations. At the Demerara railway station on the East Coast of Demerara, they assisted women traveling at night and sought to ensure their safe travel. Further, in 1963, a civil war broke out in Guyana. The women's police enforced curfews since Guyanese had to be home by 7 p.m. (British Guiana Police Force, 1964).

With their increasing experience working in underserved areas, the women police officers highlighted the plight of very young children who worked long hours. The women police even set up two beds in the Juvenile Department, where they took children in for the night (British Guiana Police Force, 1956).

It is important to note that women police officers did not conduct night patrols despite the frequent presence of groups of intoxicated servicemen on the streets. But in some regions of Georgetown, their presence was not always seen as an unwelcome intrusion, especially by women who found themselves surrounded or threatened. Due to their increased availability in urban centres such as Linden and Georgetown, women police officers were often called upon by the regular police force to assist in arresting, escorting, and supervising female detainees, thereby ensuring their protection (British Guiana Police Force, 1958).

Institutional acceptance and ongoing scepticism shaped the role of women in the BGPF and the courtroom. Since courtroom procedures were a key part of their extensive training, women police gradually gained legitimacy in legal settings. However, resistance from some magistrates persisted, highlighting the continued presence of gender biases within the judicial system (British Guiana Police Force, 1958).

Women police officers primarily focused on helping to control women suspected of prostitution. This often involved forcibly removing women with previous convictions from the towns and insisting they return to their homes, revealing the coercive aspect of their duties. Although some women officers raised concerns about legal inequalities – such as solicitation laws that targeted women while exempting men – these objections rarely challenged the legal system. Instead, women police generally enforced these laws unquestioningly and sometimes participated in corruption, for example, taking bribes from prostitutes seeking to evade arrest (British Guiana Police Force, 1961).

Some women police officers not only regulated prostitution but also upheld male, middle-class moral standards. This was particularly evident when addressing domestic violence reports. When dealing with complaints from working-class women about domestic abuse, the women police often emphasized moral discipline over providing care, aligning with prevailing social norms instead of advocating for equal rights (British Guiana Police Force, 1960). Their actions as enforcers tended to serve as social control, reinforcing gender and class inequalities rather than challenging them, which further marginalized the very women they were meant to protect (British Guiana Police Force, 1961).

As Guyanese men and others in the BGNPF grew more comfortable with female police officers, the police force's administrators followed suit. By 1975, women police officers were fully integrated into the Force. They were no longer referred to as “women police”; instead, they became law officers with equal pay, status, and respect as their male counterparts. After years of dedicated service, they secured permanent positions within the force (British Guiana Police Force, 1976).

Figure 1

First Woman Police – Assistant Superintendent Elsa Yorrick



Note. This photograph first appeared in *The Copper*, “Women in the Guyana Police Force - Assistant Superintendent Elsa Yorrick,” 1983, p. 10.

On the 30th anniversary of the Guyana Police Force (GPF), celebrations were held to honour the first women to join the force. Two of the original twelve, W.I. Cendrecourt and Assistant Superintendent Elsa Yorrick, nee Cox, of the Public Relations and Welfare Office, were still working with the GPF. Elsa Yorrick had married Superintendent Alvin Yorrick (“Women in the Guyana Police Force – Assistant Superintendent Elsa Yorrick”, 1983).

Figure 2

Sergeant Li



Note. This photograph of Sergeant Li, in full uniform at The Police College, Ryton-on-Dunsmore, England, 1955 first appeared in *The Copper*, 12th May 1983, p. 13.

Another female officer in the first group was Sergeant Li. She was promoted to Inspector in 1955 and became the leader of the female personnel in the Force. She is recognized as the first female Inspector in the GPF. In May 1955, Inspector Li took the Non-Gazette Officers Course at Ryton-on-Dunsmore, England. After finishing the course, she spent two weeks with the Metropolitan Police Force in London, focusing on practical policing, and a week with the Staffordshire Force to review their recruiting and training processes (“Women in the Guyana Police Force – Sergeant Li”, 1983). She served as the Confidential Secretary to the Commissioner and offered dedicated support during the 1963 disturbances. Throughout the unrest, she was among the female officers engaged in police-public relations and patrol duties. Inspector Li and other policewomen were stationed to

stand by whenever trains and steamers arrived in the mornings and evenings. The unit also escorted children to and from school (“Women in the Guyana Police Force – Sergeant Li”, 1983).

Sergeant Li was later succeeded by the late Joyce Williams, who was enlisted as a Sergeant and had reached the rank of Superintendent at her death. She was the first woman to command a sub-division, serving as Officer-in-Charge of No. 1 Sub-Division (Brickdam) in “A” Division. In 1957, the ‘G’ Department was established to address women's issues within the Force, with Superintendent Joyce Williams leading the department (“Women in the Guyana Police Force – Sergeant Li”, 1983).

In conclusion, these women were trailblazers who encountered distinct challenges and opened doors for future generations. The integration of women into the BGPF in 1953 was a complicated and demanding process, faced with institutional resistance, wage disparities, and legal obstacles as the women rose from turnkeys to policewomen. Nonetheless, with perseverance and commitment, these pioneering women gradually expanded their responsibilities and earned recognition. Their experiences mirror wider societal views on gender roles and professional equality. Their legacy continues to shape current discussions on women’s roles in security, justice, and social governance, emphasizing the persistent fight for gender equality in public service institutions. The trailblazing women of the BGPF left a lasting impact, exemplifying the crucial role women have played in the development of law enforcement.

References

- British Guiana Police Force. (1954). *Commissioner of Police Annual Report*.
- British Guiana Police Force. (1955). *Commissioner of Police Annual Report*.
- British Guiana Police Force. (1956). *Commissioner of Police Annual Report*.
- British Guiana Police Force. (1958). *Commissioner of Police Annual Report*.
- British Guiana Police Force. (1954, March 12). “Attachment: Resignation Letter.” *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Police*.
- Campbell, J. (1987). *History of policing in Guyana*. Georgetown, Guyana.

The First Women Police

- “A career girl? You still need to be an expert in the home.” (1953, April 6). *Daily Chronicle*, p. 3.
- “11 policewomen recruits enter barracks.” (1953, July 24)—*Daily Chronicle*, p. 1.
- Guyana Police Force. (1960). *Commissioner of Police Annual Report*.
- Guyana Police Force. (1961). *Commissioner of Police Annual Report*.
- Guyana Police Force. (1964). *Commissioner of Police Annual Report*.
- Guyana Police Force. (1976). *Commissioner of Police Annual Report*.
- Guyana Police Force. (1978). *Commissioner of Police Annual Report*.
- Harding, P. (1953, April 16). “Wanted: Women constables.” *Daily Chronicle*, p. 3.
- N.A. (1970, February). “They can lock you up! The Turnkeys.” *Guyana Police Force Magazine, Republic Edition* (8), p. 103.
- Strubee, S. (1953, April 26). “Strubee discusses women who want to be police.” *Daily Chronicle*.
- “12 made history.” (1953, August 3). *Daily Chronicle*, p. 2.
- “Two charged with arson of female recruits building.” (1953, September 16). *Daily Chronicle*, p. 12.
- Witz, A. (1994). Patriarchy and professions: The gendered politics of occupational closure. *The Journal of Sociology*, 24(4), 675–676.
- “Women in the Guyana Police Force – Assistant Superintendent Elsa Yorrick.” (n.d.). *The Copper* (14), p. 10.
- “Women in the Guyana Police Force – Sergeant Li.” (1983). *The Copper* (14), p. 13.
- “Women police, are we way over our heads?” (1953, September 15). *Daily Chronicle*, p. 2.
- “Women police one year later.” (1954, August 1). *Daily Chronicle*, p. 4.

Shammane Joseph Jackson has dedicated over two decades to teaching history in Guyana’s secondary schools. She holds a master’s degree in history and has participated in many history conferences and written several journal articles. She teaches in the Department of History and Caribbean Studies at the University of Guyana.

The Indigenous Woman and Sex Work in Jan Carew's *The Wild Coast*

Romona Bennett

Abstract

This paper examines Jan Carew's 1958 novel *The Wild Coast*, which presents a seventeen-year-old Indigenous female as a sex worker, who is caught within a system that objectifies and exploits her, and exposes her to violence. Drawing on critical discourse on representations of indigeneity in Anglophone Caribbean literature, I argue that these representations are problematic in Carew's novel because of its ambivalent focus on the young woman's agency. While she is important for the identity formation of the Bildungsroman protagonist, this representation is patronising, as she appears mainly voiceless and victimised. The paper does not focus merely on repeating the stereotypes and victimising the Indigenous woman further. Rather, through a critique of the representations, I show that *The Wild Coast* draws attention to issues that are relevant to contemporary discourses, such as the Indigenous woman's vulnerability because of her racialised and sexualised identity, and how the intersection of class, gender, and socioeconomics influences that vulnerability. Further, the paper contends that the conflation of the Indigenous woman's racialised, sexed body with the interior landscape foregrounds the possible influence of extractivist industries such as mining and logging – even offshore oil extraction – on issues such as sexual exploitation, gender-based violence, and trafficking in persons.

Keywords: Indigenous woman, Carew, representations, *The Wild Coast*, Caribbean literature

Introduction

In Jan Carew's 1958 novel *The Wild Coast*, the young Indigenous woman Dela moves from the British Guianese interior to the city, Georgetown, in search of employment. She eventually settles as a paid mistress to Fitz Bradshaw, who is represented in the novel as one of the wealthiest persons in Post-World War I British Guiana. Dela's role as a sex worker in Carew's novel is influenced by her Indigenous background, which contributes to her positioning as a pawn and commodity in an environment where her vulnerability is easily exploited. While the novel is set exclusively on Guyana's coast, the interior lands contribute to its socio-economic context and further influence the way Dela is represented. Some of these representations are problematic. For example, Carew represents Dela stereotypically, including as "Buck woman" (p. 234), one of the most offensive and divisive terms used to describe Indigenous women. In Guyanese parlance, "buck" or any

of its variations can be extremely insulting, especially if used to suggest Indigenous Peoples' ignorance, backwardness, timidity, or naivety. The term also connects Indigenous Peoples to the interior locations where the majority reside, which suggests that the racialised interior geography defines Indigenous identity (Bulkan, 2013, p. 368; Jackson, 2012, p. 12; Menezes, 1977, pp. 18-19; Whitehead, 2009, pp. 1-2). The way "buck" is used in Carew's work hints at derogatory connotations that focus on the racialised, gendered body of the Indigenous female.

The Wild Coast is named after the coastal region of Guiana, which extends from the mouth of the Orinoco River in Venezuela to that of the Amazon River in Brazil, and includes the countries referred to as the Guianas – Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana. According to Gimlett (2012), for the Dutch who named it "the Wild Coast," the entire area exuded the "promise of danger, risk, wealth and perhaps even desire" (p. 3), which aptly describes Tarlogie, the village on British Guiana's Corentyne Coast, Carew's "wild coast" where the novel is mainly set. Hector, the novel's nine-year-old protagonist, is sent to Tarlogie by his father Fitz Bradshaw to regain his health and pass his adolescent years on the family's estate. Against the backdrop of a rural community set within miles of swamps, marshland, and a wild foreshore, Hector grows into manhood, experiencing dangerous adventures and making risky decisions that shape and test his masculinity. While the main events take place in Tarlogie, there are significant references to and episodes in the capital city, Georgetown, also on the coast, where Fitz Bradshaw resides and runs his business. Dela also lives in Georgetown, but visits Tarlogie with Fitz during his illness.

Despite Dela's stereotypical representation in *The Wild Coast*, the novel draws attention to the Indigenous woman's vulnerability to exploitation and violence, which are arguably inseparable from her "racialised ethnic" (Peake & Trotz, 1999a, p. 11) identity, gender, and socio-economic status. This nexus of race, class, and gender, I argue, makes Dela vulnerable to sexual exploitation, although Carew does not critique this exploitation because the novel endorses her objectification as an Indigenous woman, plus it represents her as occupying a peripheral position in the work. I posit that Dela's relationship with the interior landscape and Fitz's conflation of her body with that landscape help to contextualise his eventual mental illness and physical decline. Fitz's history with diamond mining in the interior not only cements his position of power but also triggers his "diamond

fever” (p. 11), which influences his obsession to possess and understand Dela, whose body he cannot separate from the rich interior lands. I argue that this entanglement between Dela’s Indigenous body and land, and her sexualised identity, raises issues that are relevant to many contemporary Indigenous women and girls in Guyana, whether they identify as Guyanese or migrants to Guyana. Further, if the novel suggests an inkling of agency for Dela, it is through her resistance to Fitz’s obsession to possess her or her pending return to the interior at the end of the novel. However, these are merely hinted at, as I illustrate, so Dela’s agency is inconclusive. Furthermore, Dela’s lack of agency in the novel is illustrated through a violent incident involving her, which is crucial to the development of the Bildungsroman’s protagonist, Hector. While this paper does not have scope for a full discussion of the novel as Bildungsroman, I outline how Dela’s gendered and racialised body becomes the final catalyst for Hector’s growth into manhood. Through this brief focus on Hector’s development, I contend that Dela’s subjectivity in the novel and her growth as a character remain obscured and marginalised. Although this paper focuses mainly on a discussion of the novel, it also highlights how Carew’s work engages with contemporary discourses that are relevant to Indigenous women’s well-being. These include sexual exploitation, trafficking in persons, and gender-based violence, and how these are linked to the extractivist economy, whether through mining and logging in the hinterland, or offshore oil extraction.

My discussion of Dela’s representation in Carew’s novel draws on critical discourse regarding the representation of indigeneity in Anglophone Caribbean literature. There are three main directions that these discussions about Indigenous representation take, as I have previously outlined (Bennett, 2023). First, critics such as Ramchand (2004) and Robinson (2005) object to stereotypical representations, such as the ‘exotic’ Indian, the ‘inscrutable’ Indian, and the displaced Indian in the city, caught between a traditional way of life and modernity. Second, some critics applaud writers who move beyond stereotyping to find a ‘relevance’ in indigeneity, for example, the symbolic use of Indigenous characters in Wilson Harris’s fiction (see Ramchand, 2004; Robinson, 2005; Shields, 2014). This relevance includes a focus on themes such as national unity, nationalism, and cross-culturalism, or in some cases, the development of main characters that is made possible through the supportive roles of Indigenous characters. In *The Wild Coast*, for example,

Dela is crucial in the final stages of Hector's development as the protagonist. This focus on the 'relevance' of indigeneity in Caribbean literature also motivates a third direction in the criticism on Indigenous representation, where critics such as DeLoughrey (2007) and Jackson (2014) question what DeLoughrey refers to as "indigenous excavation" (p. 235), that is, the 'excavating' or digging up of various aspects of indigeneity for the literary writer's stylistic and thematic goals. In other words, the presence of indigeneity in literary works becomes like an archaeological treasure to be displayed, studied, and valued. The issue with using indigeneity merely for aesthetic purposes, as Jackson (2014) argues, is that there is a corresponding failure to represent "Amerindian subjectivity" (p. 528). As a result of the prioritised focus on how indigeneity can support technique, the Indigenous subject fails to emerge "on his or her own terms and conditions of speech" but remains "positioned on the outside of full literary subjectivity" (Jackson, 2014, p. 528). This engagement with indigeneity mainly for aesthetic purposes in literary writing is part of a wider embrace in Guyanese society of the ownership and appropriation of Indigenous character, culture, history and cosmology for their value to national culture, image and identity (see Jackson, 2012, pp. 6-11; Cordis, 2019, pp. 432-433; Bulkan, 2013, p. 368). As Havisser (1995) puts it, Amerindians then become "symbols for collective representation" (p. 139). My discussion of Carew's novel touches on each of the three directions outlined above. I draw attention to the stereotypical representations, not to merely repeat them, but to critique those stereotypes within the socioeconomic, historical, and political contexts in which they are represented. I also acknowledge that Carew attempts to find relevance in Dela's indigeneity, such as the role she plays in Hector's transformation at the end of the novel. However, as much as the novel succeeds in portraying Hector's growth, there is a corresponding stifling of Dela's subjectivity as a crucial minor character.

Prostitution and the racialised, gendered Indigenous body

While I acknowledge the difficulty and controversies involved in defining prostitution,¹ I use a general definition given by Ditmore (2011), who refers to it as "the

¹ For example, Ditmore (2006) notes that the definition may vary according to context, including its use in law which could also vary by country and across different time periods.

exchange of sexual services for goods or money” (p. xix). While the word prostitution is several centuries old, the term “sex work,” according to Ditmore (2011), was coined in the late seventies to replace the more stigmatising term and to cover the different types of sex work (p. xviii). She defines sex work as “a wide variety of sexual services exchanged for money or items of value” (Ditmore, 2011, p. xviii), which could range from prostitution to pornography to sex shows (Weitzer, 2011, p. 3). Although Carew’s work is set a few decades before the term sex work was coined, I use “sex work” when I am referring specifically to Dela’s live-in relationship with Fitz Bradshaw as his mistress, an arrangement for which she is offered money. While both sex work and prostitution generate income and can be used interchangeably (Ditmore, 2006, 2011), the former term also offers more scope regarding Dela’s relationship with Fitz. She does not solicit another client and remains faithful to their living arrangement throughout the novel, and Fitz continues to seek her emotional support and companionship long after their sexual relations end.

When Dela arrives in Georgetown, the “sexual economy” (Kempadoo, 2004, p. 3) that she enters is competitive but unregulated, and the novel presents her as victimised by both her clients and competitors. In their article about sex work in Guyana, Peake and Trotz (1999 b) reveal the limited job opportunities available to poor and uneducated women, with sex work being “among the most economically viable options” (p. 267). Their article focuses on the 1990s, when Indigenous women were “experiencing the highest rates of unemployment” (Peake & Trotz, 1999b, p. 270), but the paid employment options during the time of Carew’s novel, several decades before, would have been even more limited beyond Indigenous Peoples’ subsistence economies. At the time of the novel’s setting in the first post-war period, many Indigenous communities had already become less dependent on the barter or sharing systems for the exchange of goods and services. Many were included in the cash economy, in jobs such as teaching, employment in industries such as balata extraction, logging, or sale of craft, forest products, cassava products, and other produce (Bulkan & Bulkan, 2006; Colson, 1973; Griffiths & Anselmo, 2010). Dela’s presence in Georgetown therefore suggests her need for an income, and reflective of Peake’s (2010) discussion of the way Indigenous women are cajoled into sex work (p. 6), the novel positions Dela as a vulnerable Indigenous woman thrust into prostitution. She lacks negotiation skills, resulting in her “being robbed by both her clients and her

experienced competitors” (p. 71). Dela’s gendered, racialised body marks her as doubly susceptible to injustices within Georgetown’s prostitution market.

Dela’s introduction into the novel comes through her portrayal as a gullible, sexualised Indigenous prostitute, who appears out of her element soliciting clients in a competitive Georgetown environment. Laljee, Fitz Bradshaw’s scheming chauffeur and personal assistant, recruits Dela from the streets when Elsa, his employer’s mistress, leaves Fitz for a more permanent and stable relationship. Sensing Fitz’s anxiety and frustration resulting from the breakup, Laljee urgently finds Elsa’s replacement because “his livelihood depended on Fitz being in good health and since a regular paramour was as necessary to his master as food and drink, he cunningly procured one” (p. 70). Looking for a “juicy substitute” to provide for Fitz’s sexual needs, Laljee secures “his own continued well being [*sic*] by discovering a robust seventeen year old [*sic*] Amerindian girl named Dela and installed her” (p. 71) in the house that Fitz provides for his lovers. Dela’s youthfulness – her “juiciness” – is combined with the stereotype of the “thick” or “robust” Indigenous female body to justify her suitability.

According to Allsopp’s (1996) *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, in Caribbean countries such as Guyana, the term “thick” describes women who are: “buxom; sexually attractive about the bust, hips, and legs” (p. 554). Gentles-Peart (2016) highlights the celebration of, and desirability for the “thick black female body” in the Caribbean, which its popular culture also endorses (pp. 87-94).² Her work stresses that this type of body is curvaceous, voluptuous, and includes an ample bottom, seen as the pinnacle of what constitutes thickness and attractiveness (2016, p. 88). In relation to the Indigenous woman, the term includes the mons pubis or pubic mound, the fatty area that protects the pubic bone, and which lies above the labia majora. In the male sexualisation of the female Indigenous body, a thick mons pubis is automatically linked to a sexualised and “robust” or strong-looking body. Arguably, the most questionable contemporary representation of this is by Bhattacharya (2011), described to his narrator during his journey to Kaieteur Falls: “‘Gooroo, you seen buckgal pattacake? High and pink, like so’ – he cupped his hands together – ‘like a mound. Jus like a mound’” (p. 39). I do not repeat this stereotype to give

² See Thorington Springer (2008), “Roll It Gal”: Alison Hinds, Female Empowerment, and Calypso” pp. 93-129.

credence to Bhattacharya, but to suggest that representations such as these help to perpetuate the hypersexualisation of the female Indigenous body, which in turn makes her vulnerable to sexual preying and violence, as Bhattacharya's novel also shows, and as evident in Dela's case.

Barely a consenting adult and still a teenager, Dela stands no chance against the predatory Laljee and Fitz. As if to justify Laljee's good judgement, Dela "offered up her young succulent limbs" (p. 71) to the middle-aged, unhealthy Fitz. To 'discover' and then 'install' Dela as an object suggests her commodification, and unsurprisingly, she literally remains "installed" (p. 71) as a house fixture in Fitz's other Georgetown house to fulfil his sexual needs. According to Ditmore (2006), commodification "is the reduction of a human being into an article of exchange, an object or product that is valued only for its economic usefulness" (p. 114). As a sex worker, Dela is perceived similarly to Elsa, whom Fitz regards "as a commodity which could be purchased, used and discarded as he chose," or raise his bid for if necessary (pp. 39-40). However, unlike Dela who unquestioningly and faithfully remains till the end, Elsa reminds Fitz that her arrangement with him is temporary since the relationship leaves her at a dead end (pp. 39-41). Elsa leaves, on her own terms, but "everyone who knew [Dela] was certain that she would remain there to the end of her days" (p. 121), a perception that casts her as subjected to Fitz's control.

The commodifying and sexualising of Dela's body cannot be separated from her vulnerability as a marginalised, displaced, and disoriented Indigenous newcomer to Georgetown, which Laljee and Fitz exploit. She readily agrees to become Fitz's "concubine" when Laljee approaches her because "for months she had been on the loose, drifting from one brothel to the other and being robbed by both her clients and her experienced competitors. The idea of a steady allowance and free accommodation appealed to her" (p. 71). The arrangement between Fitz and Dela can be described as "transactional sex," a relationship that includes "a deliberate exchange of sex for some form of 'betterment' – material goods, clothes, accommodation" and others (Kempadoo, 2009, p. 4). However, in seeing her income and accommodation as "free," as a favour, Dela is unaware of her value and service to Fitz in their relationship, unlike Elsa who assuredly tells him that "is not money I'm after this time, is love" (p. 39). Throughout the novel, Dela contentedly views Fitz as her benefactor, ignoring her own intimate, emotional, and social

needs long after he becomes unwell. But Laljee also draws on another stereotype, a perceived history of Indigenous Peoples' need for, and dependence on handouts, which began with the Dutch and continues in the contemporary period (Menezes, 1977, pp. 46-49; Peake, 2010, p. 6; Shuman, 2021). He exaggerates Fitz's position and wealth, promising security for Dela: "he was as rich as the Governor, more potent than any Amerindian brave, a stern but benevolent protector" (p. 71). This description also smacks of the legacy of protectionism and paternalism directed at Indigenous Peoples in Guyana (see Sanders, 1995; Bulkan & Bulkan, 2006). Not only does Laljee presume that Dela would welcome financial and other dependence on Fitz, but he also takes advantage of her inexperience, lack of assuredness, and her gullibility, the latter a stereotype that is commonly associated with Indigenous Peoples in Guyana. According to Peake and Trotz (1999 b) in their article on sex work in Guyana, Indigenous women are among those "especially vulnerable to deception and coercion" (p. 264). Dela's dependence satisfies Laljee's scheme to manipulate her, and "once the matter was settled, Laljee asked for an increase in salary and Fitz gave him an extra three dollars a month" (p. 71). He keeps his dream of investing in his own "salt-goods shop" (p.125) alive, thanks to Dela.

Dela's vulnerability to sexual exploitation is also linked to the dynamics of class and socio-economic status that the novel emphasises. Critics such as Francis (2010), Katrak (2006), Kempadoo (2007), Smith (2011), and Trotz and Roopnarine (2009) have written about how the intersections of race, class, gender, and economics affect the sexed body, including its control in relationships involving power dynamics, which can result in brutal cycles of oppression. The power dynamics and control even extend to the state authorities and international organisations (Kempadoo, 2007, p. 83; Trotz & Roopnarine, 2009, pp. 235-244). As Trotz and Roopnarine (2009) illustrate, the vulnerable female Indigenous body becomes the centre of anti-trafficking conflict between the Guyanese state and the U.S administration, in the latter's push for anti-trafficking legislation (p. 243). In *The Wild Coast*, although Dela is controlled by both Laljee and Fitz, their stake in the power dynamics is made possible largely because of her economic dependence and social positioning within the 1930s Georgetown society in which she finds herself.

The novel's representation of social class is similar to that in Carew's *Black Midas*, which, as Birbalsingh (2002) argues, focuses on the "inner workings of race, colour and

class in colonial Guyana” (p. 26). From the outset, Dela becomes implicated in other characters’ conflicts regarding money and class, such as Laljee’s scheme to earn enough to invest in his own business. In Tarlogie, a name that connects Guyana’s colonial past to Scotland, the “brown boy” (p. 51) Hector lives in “the big house” that is “fenced in with barbed wire” (p. 5), and which resonates with images of the Great Houses of colonial sugar plantations. In fact, Fitz is the descendant of a plantation and slave owner, whose estate he has inherited, and part of Hector’s growth is recognizing and negotiating his place within the class structure of Georgetown, and particularly Tarlogie (p. 69). Elsa is convinced that it is “protocol” that prevents Fitz from settling into a more permanent relationship with her, accusing him of ignoring her as a “flesh-and-blood woman” (p. 40). She knows he will never marry her, despite his professed need for her (pp. 40-41). Similarly, Hector’s older friend Tengar “knew that some day his master’s son would grow apart from him. Book learning and a consciousness of social difference would create a widening chasm between them” (p. 84), even as Hector ignores or resists the “rigid social distinctions” (p. 69) throughout the novel.

Dela, on the other hand, is perceived by other characters as occupying a social standing that is outside of the coastal class structure, and as having a racialised identity that mainly connects her to “a village in the high savannahs” (p. 71). As an Indigenous woman, she is seen as occupying a space that marks her as “that Buck-woman” (p. 234), so that “although Dela had left the forest to come to the city it was as if she had brought invisible jungles with her and planted them all around her cottage” (p. 121). This cloak of the “jungle” marks her as Other within the coastal setting of the novel. In addition, the novel’s representation of the “inscrutability of her people” (p. 71), and their stagnation and lethargy further alienate her among the other characters:

Fitz did not understand her and never would [...]. She was a child of silence. She belonged to a race of waiting people. No one knew the purpose of their waiting. [...] It had taken them ten thousand years to trek down from the Behring Straits and they seemed willing to wait another ten millennia for the fulfilment of their private dreams. They were a forest people. The forest was a good place in which to wait. (p. 121)

As an estate owner and successful businessman whose start-up capital comes from the same forest he associates with Dela's slothfulness, Fitz dismisses Indigenous Peoples' relationship with the interior lands as inconsequential, idle, and irreconcilable with his own entrepreneurship and greed. Consequently, when Dela moves to Georgetown seeking employment, her racialised, gendered forest identity initially marks her body as both accessible and exploitable.

Diamond fever and the female Indigenous body

Dela's association with the interior landscape influences her representation as an extension of the mineral-rich lands that account for Fitz's wealth. Consequently, her vulnerability to sexualisation, sexual labour, and gender-based violence are inseparable from her connection with that landscape. Cordis (2019), for example, argues that the interior landscape is "inextricably linked to the racial-sexual Amerindian female body" (p. 442), that is "innately hypersexualised," and "predisposed for sexual labour" and in some cases, "violable and 'rapeable'" (p. 444). In other words, as we see in Dela's case, Fitz's obsession with exploitable interior lands is projected onto Dela's body. Kempadoo (2004) also argues that the sexual economy is "deeply embedded" (p. 3) in global industries such as mining and tourism, and racialised and gendered bodies are implicated in these dynamics. In Guyana, the competitive extractive industries such as mining and logging, along with the oil economy, provide the perfect opportunities for "hegemonic gendered, racialized, and economic structures of domination and exploitation" (Kempadoo, 2004, p. 4). Consequently, many Indigenous women become vulnerable to sexual exploitation (Colchester, La Rose & James, 2002, p. 43; SRDC, 2021, pp. 4-5).

Fitz's diamond mining in the interior influences his socio-economic status but also triggers his desire to keep exploiting the land, which is magnified in his purported "diamond fever," a psychological obsession with the diamonds in the interior lands. According to Dodo, the city beggar, "the diamond fever burn [Fitz] up" and "he sell he soul" to make his fortune (p. 11). His diamond fever, in turn, influences his obsession with Dela, whose body he conflates with the rich interior lands. Fitz has resuscitated his family's run-down estate in Tarlogie and built a city business from a successful mining trip to the Mazaruni diamond mining district, earning him the nickname "Mazaruni Bradshaw," after

the river that was synonymous with gold and diamond mining in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Guyana. At least two of Carew's novels focus on the Guyanese pork-knocker, an independent prospector and miner referred to by Wilfred Greatorex (1957) as an "individualist" (p. 18). Carew's other 1958 novel about pre-independence Guyana, *Black Midas*, deals more exclusively with the pork-knocker figure in its main character Shark, who has mixed success with diamond mining, and whose disillusionment with the class system suffocates him. However, *Black Midas* also stresses the magnetism of the interior lands that represent wealth for El Dorado dreamers like Carew's fictional characters Shark and Fitz, as well as the thousands of others across centuries, who keep returning and hoping that their luck might strike (Niblett, 2011, pp. 246-250). According to Niblett (2011), in his discussion of the environmental legacies of colonialism in Carew's *Black Midas*, the land exists as an "object to be possessed, penetrated and drained of its resources" (p. 239), which is also evident in *The Wild Coast*. Like Shark, Fitz "go away to the diamond mines and make a fortune" (p. 11), according to Dodo, the city beggar, whose Guyanese use of the term "go away" captures the physical and social separation involved in leaving the coastland and journeying to the interior lands, similar to "going away" to a foreign country. The passion for diamonds and prospecting the land are presented as life-giving sources for pork-knockers, whose success in the bush is measured by diamond yield rather than social class. As Elsa tells Fitz, "You make you' money in the diamond mines working like a slave, sweating and cussing and knocking about jus' like any man from the nigger-yards" (p. 41). This obsession with diamonds, according to Elsa "was the only time [he] was ever living," (p. 41) connecting Fitz' vitality with interior diamond mines and his mysterious illness with separation from that space.

Greatorex's 1957 travel narrative *Diamond Fever* takes its title from the mania and intensity associated with the diamond rush in British Guiana during the first half of the twentieth century, especially the twenties, thirties, and early forties (see, e.g., Fowler, 1908; La Varre, 1919, 1936; Richardson, 1925). Greatorex's (1957) book suggests that some diamond miners experience an obsession with mining, always having the urge to quell the "fever that burned within" (p. 15), convinced of "rich prizes to be wrung from the creeks" (p. 67). While Fitz does not physically return to the diamond mining areas in the novel, he projects his masculinist pork-knocker yearning onto women's bodies, most evidently on

Dela's. The gossip beggar Dodo explains Fitz's dilemma thus: "now he got to drown he memory in rum and find solitude in woman flesh" (p. 11), owing to the "stone weighing down he soul" (p. 129). In his attempt to convince Elsa to remain with him, Fitz describes his despondency as his spirit "drying up. It's withering and shrinking" (p. 40). Although Fitz earns his wealth before the start of the novel, his psychological connection to the interior diamond mines, his "diamond fever," is represented as central to his mental turmoil and physical decline.

In the absence of the physical journeys to quell his diamond fever, Fitz's restless obsession manifests through his preoccupation with possessing and understanding Dela, whose identity is never separated from her connection to the Guyana interior where Fitz experiences mining success. Although she shares similar arrangements with Fitz as Elsa did, Fitz regards Dela differently, wanting to possess and understand her beyond what she allows, gaining "a perverse delight out of knowing that he had bought Dela but could never own her" (p. 121). He expects more of her body than the fulfilment of his sexual needs, confirmed in his justification for offering to marry her; to "get closer to the well springs [*sic*] of Dela's strength and marriage was a clumsy device through which he thought he could have achieved this" (p. 121). However, Dela refuses his proposal on the grounds that she is satisfied with their present arrangement (p. 121). According to the narrator, Fitz's attempts at communicating with and understanding Dela "was like pounding his fists against a granite boulder," a desperate preoccupation that leaves him vulnerable (p. 121). Dela is inaccessible to Fitz in a way that presents her as mysterious and distant, possessing the "disciplined inscrutability of her people" (p. 71). In this complex relationship, I read Fitz's desire for Dela as being connected to his "diamond fever" which causes him to project his need for diamonds in the interior landscape on her body. As de Finney (2017) argues in her discussion of Indigenous girls' resilience in settler states, there is an "intimate link between colonial exploitation of both Indigenous lands and Indigenous bodies" (p. 11). In Carew's novel, the female Indigenous body remains inseparable from the interior lands, and exploitable like the lands, as represented through Fitz's obsession with Dela.

The female Indigenous body, the Bildungsroman protagonist and possible agency

As Bildungsroman, *The Wild Coast* follows the individual development and identity formation of Hector Bradshaw, Fitz's son, who lives on the Corentyne Coast for most of the novel's duration. Dela also plays a significant role in Hector's initiation into manhood, specifically in the affirmation of his masculinity and his place within the social order of a post-war, colonial Guyanese society. Critics such as Mullaney (2010), Gunning (2014), and Bolaki (2011) have discussed how the traditionally conservative Bildungsroman genre has been appropriated by postcolonial and contemporary writers who unsettle, for example, the relatively stable social order into which the protagonist finds growth and independence. As protagonist, Hector's development is straightforward, made possible through his movement away from his immediate family, his formal and informal education, and the masculinist adventures that he experiences in Tarlogie. At the novel's conclusion, Hector embraces the possibilities of the life ahead of him, leaving Tarlogie and the "wild coast" behind.

However, the novel's resolution regarding Hector is made possible through a horrific episode in Tarlogie involving Dela. This incident also lays bare the tensions regarding class that I discussed earlier, especially relating to Dela, while simultaneously confirming Hector's position as a 'good' citizen. It reveals a fractured and corrupt society moving towards the tail end of colonial rule, alongside a protagonist who leaves his childhood relatively unscathed, ready to face "the aloneness of wide spaces" (p. 255). Hector's formal education bodes well for further study, and his leadership promises hope for the new nation, but these are presented alongside what Bolaki (2011) refers to as "contentious tensions" (p. 11), which undermine the stability of the traditional Bildungsroman. The tensions in Carew's novel include Dela's alienation and abuse, and the context of these in postcolonial British Guiana.

Dela's near-fatal physical and verbal abuse at the hands of Tarlogie villagers cements her position as Other within a Creole society that is still reeling from the effects of slavery and indentureship, manifested in domestic abuse, especially against women, alcoholism, a corrupt police and judicial system, and the lack of resources and social services such as education. As Mullaney (2010) argues, for postcolonial writers, the Bildungsroman's "idea of a stable social order" is exposed as misleading in the writers'

“excavation of how societies are fractured, damaged and derailed by the legacies of colonialism” (p. 32). For my purposes here, the presence of Dela in Tarlogie and her treatment critiques some of the colonial institutions that are intended to create and support an organised and moral society. Sister, Hector’s caregiver, is one of the most religious and morally upright persons in the village. Yet Dela’s presence in the Bradshaw house unnerves her, not only because she views Dela’s common-law relationship with Fitz as shameful to his family, but because, as “Buck-woman” (p. 234), Dela makes Sister’s “skin crawl” (p. 235), an aversion that relegates the former to eating with the servants in the kitchen. Sister’s devotion to Christian religious teachings gives way to accusations of iniquity, including of Dela’s “sucking [Fitz’s] substance out like a vampire” and bringing evil into the house (p. 235). Subsequently, Sister’s natural death worsens Dela’s marginalisation in the village, leading to villagers blaming her for the elderly woman’s demise and almost stoning her to death. Summoned as a leader, Hector hurries to stop the crowd from injuring Dela further, but “men and women were kicking and cuffing her and beating her with sticks. Hector broke through the crowd and stood over her, and the blows that fell on him drove away his fear and filled him with fury” (p. 253). At sixteen years old, Hector resists and overcomes almost an entire, angry village with one command: “‘Leave her alone!’ he shouted and his voice was that of his pristine manhood. It silenced the crowd and those nearest him backed away” (p. 254). Hector’s response to the criminal treatment of Dela is the moment that marks his coming of age.

Hector grows up a responsible, educated, and respectable citizen but the pre-Independence society he inherits is one that spontaneously erupts into lawlessness, corruption and racially inspired systemic abuse. He describes the angry crowd as “the monster which had emerged out of the swamps” (p. 253), suggesting that chaos is always lurking alongside, or beneath, ineffective colonial institutions. Pastor Galloway apologises for his absence and inability to stop the mayhem (p. 255); the Sergeant contemplates pressing charges but instead of conferring with Dela, the main victim, he consults with Hector, who wonders “what’s the use of charging them” (p. 256). Instead, he promises not to report the incident in Georgetown, to save the Sergeant from reprimand. As an Indigenous woman, Dela remains insignificant within a dysfunctional society that Hector at least shows potential in navigating. Yet, his transition into adulthood is confirmed

through his defence of Dela, her quiet gratitude, “an endorsement of what, in the last few days, he had come to know and to accept – that his initiation into manhood was now complete” (p. 255). As the family’s new head in the wake of his father’s insanity, Hector turns to his new life with the sounds of “Dela’s shuffling footsteps behind him” (p. 256). The novel presents her as his responsibility, an Indigenous woman whose future seems as uncertain as Hector’s is promising.

Although the novel hints at Dela’s agency through her return journey home, the ambivalence surrounding her return obscures any conviction that Dela acts on her own terms by the novel’s conclusion. The novel does not represent Dela as achieving much beyond her income earned through sex work. She hardly ever utters a full sentence. She lurks in the shadows of rooms and around other characters, occupying a peripheral place in the novel. She is represented as being selflessly devoted to Fitz and, therefore, hopelessly naïve and powerless to chart her own trajectory. When Fitz becomes too ill, Dela concludes she may have to leave, but comforts herself that she “would return to their tribal lands and live in plenty on what she had saved up” (p. 252). As an Indigenous sex worker, Dela’s body becomes what Kempadoo (2004) describes as “a site of potential, [and] transformation,” which exists “within physically, socially, and culturally produced limits” (p. 42). If Dela were to physically leave the coastal space that facilitates her exploitation and marginalisation, she would potentially return to the interior with more economic options available to her and dignity.

Dela’s return to the interior lands and community could hypothetically be read as resistance and resilience in the face of colonial capitalism, exploitation of, and violence against her body and socio-cultural marginalisation. However, the novel does not focus on Dela’s subjectivity, even though she plays a crucial role in Hector’s development, and Fitz’s story involves her in major ways. As Jackson (2014) puts it, Indigenous characters are valued for their metaphorical labour in Caribbean literature as they “are made to work for Creole social being” (p. 521). We need to look no further than Elsa, whose voice, perspective, and actions are given more attention, as pointed out earlier. On the other hand, Dela’s “shuffling footsteps” (p. 256) remind us of her lurking presence, insofar as the novel warrants that presence. She can easily return home when Fitz becomes extremely ill, but she displays a willingness to stay on if Fitz needs her (p. 252), to remain a shadow “living

in the twilight world of Fitz's madness" (p. 242). As Fitz acknowledges, "she doesn't love me, doesn't even care for me, but she's loyal, one hundred per cent loyal" (p. 232). The novel, therefore, presents her as needing money, which she earns through sex work, but there is hardly any indication of a life beyond this, apart from her dreams of returning home with plenty of cash. Where there is some hope that she may show resilience by returning to and embracing her traditional heritage, this is not sustained. Dela's thoughts about her "tribal lands" (p. 252) are suggestive of Dela's awareness and appreciation for her homeland, kinship community, and cultural heritage, but that is as far as the novel goes, offering her a thought. I draw on de Finney's (2017) concept of resilience, which focuses on Indigenous girls' sense of belonging, empowerment, and dignity that are linked to their communities and kinship systems. This idea of resilience honours Indigenous girls as "citizens of sovereign Indigenous nations who are intimately linked to their tribal and kinship networks, lands, and ancestors" (de Finney 2017, p. 11). This concept of resilience does not focus primarily on the minority success stories of Indigenous girls and women securing education placements through competitive examinations and other processes, or attaining graduate-level education, or securing high-paying jobs. Rather, this concept of resilience locates the dignity of the Indigenous girl or woman within her community and relationship with land. It also focuses on her role in community development, leadership, and the safeguarding and promotion of her cultural heritage. According to de Finney (2017), such resilience offers hope for Indigenous women and girls "to live with pride and dignity that do not include violence against their bodies and resource exploitation of their homelands" (p. 16). Carew's novel offers Dela very little for herself, except money if she returns home, a hypothetical option at best, given her resolve to remain on 'the wild coast' for as long as Fitz needs her.

Conclusion

Dela's representation as a sex worker in Carew's *The Wild Coast* draws attention to Indigenous women's vulnerability to exploitation because of their socio-economic status and racialised identities. I do not believe that Carew interrogates Dela's exploitation and all the dynamics surrounding it, because apart from representing her stereotypically, his novel endorses her objectification and presents her as occupying a peripheral position.

Instead, she is important to the development of the novel's main characters, including Fitz Bradshaw and his son Hector. Her relationship with Fitz helps to provide the context for his "diamond fever," an obsession with the interior lands and mining that is inseparable from his obsession with Dela, on whom he projects his desire for land and diamonds. Her contact with Hector is brief, but critical to his transition into manhood as the protagonist of the Bildungsroman. While the novel presents characters like Hector as moving forward confidently with new identities and responsibilities amid a disordered society, it barely offers any optimism for Dela. She remains a sexualised, shadowy, victimised, and objectified presence in the novel. There is some hint of resilience for her, through the return to her community and kinship system, but there is nothing substantial to suggest that Dela moves on from serving Fitz's needs. Carew's *The Wild Coast*, while problematic in its racial and gendered stereotyping, still raises important questions and issues regarding contemporary discourses surrounding marginalised and vulnerable women, particularly Indigenous women. Perhaps Carew's novel will also inspire a retelling of Dela's story, one that gives her more dignity as a woman with voice, action, and perspective.

References

- Allsopp, R. (1996). *Dictionary of Caribbean English usage*. With a French and Spanish supplement, edited by Jeannette Allsopp. Oxford University Press.
- Bennett, R. M. (2023). *Representations of Indigenous women in cultural texts set in British Guiana/Guyana* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Leicester).
- Bhattacharya, R. (2011). *The sly company of people who care*. Picador.
- Birbalsingh, F. (2002). Race, colour and class in Black Midas. *Race and Class*, 43(3), 19-26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396802043003705>
- Bolaki, S. (2011). *Unsettling the Bildungsroman: Reading contemporary ethnic American women's fiction*. Rodopi.
- Bulkan, J. (2013). The struggle for recognition of the indigenous voice: Amerindians in Guyanese politics. *The Round Table*, 102(4), 367-380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2013.795009>

The Indigenous Woman and Sex Work

- Bulkan, J., & Bulkan, A. (2006). 'These forests have always been ours': Official and Amerindian discourses on Guyana's forest estate. In M. C. Forte (Ed.), *Indigenous resurgence in the contemporary Caribbean: Amerindian survival and revival* (pp. 135-154). Peter Lang.
- Carew, J. (1958). *Black Midas*. Secker & Warburg.
- Carew, J. (1958). *The Wild Coast*. Secker & Warburg.
- Colchester, M, La Rose, J. & James, K. (2002). Mining and Amerindians in Guyana. Amerindian Peoples Association and The North-South Institute, 2002. [01.PDF \(leiden.edu\)](#).
- Colson, A. B. (1973). Inter-tribal trade in Guiana Highlands. *Antropológica* 34, 1-70.
- Cordis, S. (2019). 'Push ya' body': Imaginaries of the 'bush' and the Amerindian body in the Guyanese state. In D. A. Trotz & A. Bulkan (Eds.), *Unmasking the state: politics, society, and economy in Guyana, 1992-2015* (pp. 429-454). Ian Randle.
- de Finney, S. (2017). Indigenous girls' resilience in settler states: Honouring body and land sovereignty. *Agenda*, 31(2), 10-21.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2017.1366179>.
- DeLoughrey, E. M. (2007). *Routes and roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island literatures*. University of Hawai'i Press. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/8265>.
- Ditmore, M. H. (2006). *Encyclopedia of prostitution and sex work: Vol. 1*. Greenwood Press.
- Ditmore, M. H. (2011). *Prostitution and sex work*. E-book ed., ABC-CLIO.
- Francis, D. (2010). *Fictions of feminine citizenship: Sexuality and the nation in contemporary Caribbean literature*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fowler, F. (1908). History of gold mining in British Guiana. In J. B. Harrison, *The geology of the gold fields of British Guiana*, with historical, geographical, and other chapters by F. Fowler & C. Wilgress (pp. 5-8). Anderson, Dulau & Co. Internet Archive, [The Geology of the Goldfields of British Guiana: John Burchmore Harrison](#).
- Gentles-Peart, K. (2016). *Romance with voluptuousness: Caribbean women and thick bodies in the United States*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Gimlette, J. (2012). *Wild Coast: Travels on South America's untamed edge*. Profile Books.
- Greatorex, W. (1957). *Diamond fever*. Cassell & Co.
- Griffiths, T., & Anselmo, L. (2010). Indigenous Peoples and sustainable livelihoods in Guyana: an overview of experiences and potential opportunities. Amerindian Peoples Association, Forest Peoples Programme and The North-South Institute. [guyana_livelihoods_apr10_ed_rev_21jun10_eng.indd \(forestpeoples.org\)](#).

- Gunning, D. (2014). Unhappy Bildungsromane. In J. Baxter and D. James (Eds.), *Andrea Levy* (pp. 9-22). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Haviser, J. B. (1995). Towards romanticized Amerindian identities among Caribbean Peoples: A case study from Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles. In N. L. Whitehead (Ed.), *Wolves from the Sea* (pp.139-156). Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.
https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004652514_009
- Jackson, S. N. (2012). *Creole indigeneity: Between myth and nation in the Caribbean*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Jackson, S. N. (2014). The Re/Presentation of the Indigenous Caribbean in literature. In J. H. Cox and D. H. Justice (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature* (pp. 520-535). Oxford University Press.
- Katrak, K. H. (2006). *Politics of the female body: Postcolonial women writers of the Third World*. Rutgers University Press.
- Kempadoo, K. (2009). Caribbean sexuality: Mapping the field. *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 3, 1-24, [Microsoft Word - CRGS Kempadoo.doc \(uwi.edu\)](#).
- Kempadoo, K. (2004). *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, race and sexual labor*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Kempadoo, K. (2007). The war on human trafficking in the Caribbean. *Race & Class* 49 (2), 79-85. doi:[10.1177/03063968070490020602](https://doi.org/10.1177/03063968070490020602).
- La Varre, W. (1936). *Jungle Treasure*. Hurst & Blackett.
- La Varre, W. (1919). *Up the Mazaruni for diamonds*. Marshall Jones.
- Menezes, M. N. (1977). *British policy towards the Amerindians in British Guiana 1803-1873*. Oxford University Press.
- Mullaney, J. (2010). *Postcolonial literatures in context*. Continuum.
- Niblett, M. (2011). 'When you take thing out the earth and you en't put nothing back': nature, form and the metabolic rift in Jan Carew's Black Midas. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 46(2), 237-255.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989411404990>.
- Peake, L. (2010). The lost Amerindian girls, the tooth fairy, and the whore of Babylon. Geographic Paper No. 190, University of Reading, 33rd Norma Wilkinson Memorial Lecture, delivered on December 2, 2009. GP190.pdf (reading.ac.uk).
- Peake, L., & Trotz, D. A. (1999 a). *Gender, ethnicity and place: Women and identity in Guyana*. E-book ed., Taylor & Francis Group.
- Peake, L., & Trotz, D. A. (1999 b). 'Givin' lil bit fuh lil bit': Women and sex work in

- Guyana.” In K. Kempadoo (Ed.), *Sun, Sex, and Gold: Tourism and Sex Work in the Caribbean* (pp. 263-290). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ramchand, K. (2004). *The West Indian novel and its background*. Ian Randle Publishers.
- Richardson, G. (1925). *On the diamond trail in British Guiana*. Methuen & Company.
- Robinson, J. (2005). Amerindians in Caribbean literature. In E. Benson & L. W. Conolly (Eds.), *Routledge encyclopedia of post-colonial literatures in English 2nd Ed.*, Routledge.
- Sanders, A. (1995). Protected status and the Amerindians of Guyana: A comparative examination. *Social and Economic Studies*, 44(2/3), 125-41. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27866029>.
- Shields, T. (2014). ‘There once was an Indian’ who imagined elsewhere and others. In M. Bucknor and A. Donnell (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature* (pp. 441-449). Routledge.
- Shuman, L. (2021). I wish to remind the Prime Minister of commitments that are yet to yield results. Letter to the Editor, *Stabroek News*, December 9, 2021. [I wish to remind the Prime Minister of commitments made that are yet to yield results - Stabroek News](#)
- Smith, F. L. (2011). Introduction: sexing the citizen. In F. L. Smith (Ed.), *Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean* (pp. 1-7). University of Virginia Press.
- South Rupununi District Council. 2021. SRDC submission to support the development of a general recommendation on the rights of Indigenous women and girls by the committee on the elimination of discrimination against women.
- Springer, J. T. (2008). ‘Roll it gal’: Alison Hinds, female empowerment, and calypso. *Meridians*, 8(1), 93-129. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40338913>.
- Trotz, D. A. & Roopnaraine, T. (2009). Angles of vision from the Coast and Hinterland of Guyana. In N. L. Whitehead & S. W. Alemán (Eds.), *Anthropologies of Guayana: cultural spaces in Northeastern Amazonia* (pp. 235-253). University of Arizona Press.
- Weitzer, R. (2011). *Legalizing prostitution: From illicit vice to lawful business*. New York University Press.
- Whitehead, N. L. (2009). Guyana as anthropological imaginary: Elements of a history. In N. L. Whitehead & S. W. Alemán (Eds.), *Anthropologies of Guayana: Cultural spaces in Northeastern Amazonia* (pp. 1-20). University of Arizona Press.

Dr. Romona Bennett is a lecturer in the Department of Language and Cultural Studies, where she teaches various courses across the literature programme. Her research interests include Guyanese and Caribbean literature, literary education, and Indigenous studies. Her forthcoming chapter in *Sacred Places in the Arctic and Beyond* also draws on ecology.

Experimenting with Ungrading in the English Service Courses at the University of Guyana

Mark Mc Gowan

Abstract

This paper explores the impact of ungraded assessments on student learning when introduced in a first-year undergraduate English course at the University of Guyana (UG). It captures the findings of a qualitative study, which was part of a wider Action Research Study conducted from 2020 to 2023, aimed at improving assessment methods in the three English service courses offered at Guyana's national university. The study examines the impact that the innovation of an ungraded portfolio had on improving the reading and writing skills of students enrolled in ENG 1105 – an introductory English course offered to over 2,000 students annually. The paper highlights the challenges and benefits of implementing ungrading in a traditional educational setting, underscoring the importance of feedback and allowing students the chance to implement this feedback before final submissions. Overall, the case is made for the gradual incorporation of ungrading in UG's English service courses to be used alongside traditional forms of assessment.

Keywords: ungrading, assessment, educational innovation

Background to Study

Persistent complaints by academic staff of the University of Guyana (UG) about the poor academic language skills of students even after they have completed the English service courses offered by the Language Centre within the Faculty of Education and Humanities raise questions about the effectiveness of the courses, including how they are assessed and if they adequately prepare students with the language skills needed for other courses in their programmes of study and professional lives (Rose & Sookraj, 2015; Rose, 2016; Wilkinson, 2011). Consequently, this study was undertaken to examine the impact that the use of alternative methods of assessing students, such as ungraded portfolio assignments, could have on student learning.

The ENG 1105 Course

ENG 1105: The Use of English is a foundation course at UG offered annually to over 2,000 students enrolled at the Turkeyen and Tain campuses. It is usually the first of the English service courses most students take, and it introduces them to the use of English

in academic settings, with a focus on the reading and writing skills necessary for university study. At the same time, the course seeks to raise the language awareness of students by educating them about the linguistic realities of Guyana.

This 13-week course is normally delivered online, and students are expected to attend 2-hour lectures and 2-hour tutorials weekly. During UG's recess/summer period, the course is taught over 6-8 weeks. Upon completing the course, students are expected to be able to read, analyse, summarise, and synthesise academic materials to produce sound academic writing. Assessments in the course usually include a reading comprehension test, an annotated bibliography, an essay outline, and a term paper, and all form part of the course's summative evaluation.

The introduction of an ungraded portfolio in the course, ENG 1105, was done to determine how it would help develop the reading and writing skills of first-year students at UG. It was triggered by a decision by the team of instructors to award 10% of a student's overall grade for participation in class activities to curb irregular student attendance and poor course engagement.

Based on research which shows that students learn more when they participate in class, many instructors have successfully incentivised participation by including it as part of the student's overall grade (Bell, 2021; Czekanski & Wolf, 2013; Precourt & Gainor, 2018). Some of the benefits of grading classroom participation, according to Holly et al. (2024), include encouraging language communication skills and students' critical reflection on issues related to class content.

With this in mind, the participation grade in the ENG 1105 course was seen as an opportunity for innovation as part of this action research study aimed at improving assessment methods in the English service courses through ungrading.

This study was guided by these two research questions:

1. How does the use of an ungraded portfolio as an assessment strategy in the English service course, ENG 1105, help students develop their reading and writing skills?
2. How do the other traditional grade-based assessments in the English service course, ENG 1105, effectively assess the reading and writing skills of students?

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Framework

Integral to any study is the research paradigm which reflects the researcher's philosophical orientation and influences every decision in the research process, not least, the choice of methodology and methods (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). For this study, the Interpretivist/Constructivist research paradigm was utilised because of the interest in discovering what students considered to be the impact of the innovation on their reading and writing skills. Notably, the primary intention of the Interpretivist paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience, and this is done by the researcher trying to gain an understanding and interpretation of what the subject is thinking or making of their context.

A popular methodology utilised by researchers who approach research from the Interpretivist paradigm is Action Research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) and these are systematic procedures done by practitioners to gather quantitative or qualitative data, or both together, to improve some aspect of their professional setting (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). Within an educational setting, Mertler (2020) contended that the primary goal of action research is to find immediate solutions to existing local-level problems of practice.

Another key consideration in this study was the nature of the instructional approaches used to teach reading and writing skills in the course, which reflect beliefs on how adult learners best learn to read and write. The Schema Theory of Reading and the Process Theory of Writing are two theoretical perspectives that help to explain this, while simultaneously shaping the innovation used.

The Schema Theory of Reading

Reading is more than possessing the ability to decode words, but extends to being able to extract both the implicit and explicit meanings from written texts (Rasakumaran & Patrick, 2019). The Schema Theory tries to explain how readers use prior knowledge to understand and learn from texts (An, 2013). Schema, according to Axelrod (1973), refers to pre-existing assumptions that people have about the way the world is organised. Therefore, when new information becomes available, the individual usually attempts to fit

this new information into a pattern they previously used to interpret information about the same topic. In summary, the Schema Theory emphasises that understanding a text is an interactive process between the background knowledge of the reader and the text and involves much more than just relying on a person's existing linguistic knowledge (Shen, 2008).

There are three key types of schemas – language, content, and form – all of which have a strong influence on reading comprehension (Li & Zang, 2016). Language schema, they explained, refers to the knowledge of vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar, while content schema focuses on the background knowledge of the subject, including the cultural background, related information, and previous experience of the reader. Further, form schema focuses on the knowledge of rhetorical organisational structures, and it is the combination of all three types of schemas that leads to strong readers in English.

Given that one of the objectives of ENG 1105 is to help students identify rhetorical organisational structures present in written texts and to guide them in using these strategies in their own writing, applying the Schema Theory of Reading seems appropriate. Guided by the belief that students are better able to understand texts if they can utilise language, content, and form schema, these connections were often emphasised during class discussions and activities. Further, the introduction of the ungraded portfolio allowed students to further explore these connections in writing without the fear of being graded harshly.

The Process Theory of Writing

The Process Theory of Writing overtly emerged in the late 1950s as a response to growing criticisms of the then-popular traditional and prescriptive approaches to teaching writing (Collins, 2013). According to Reither (1985), the Process Theory moved away from a prescriptive pedagogy where writing is taught as producing a product to one where it is acknowledged as a process. Research studies, according to Collins (2013), revealed that students often failed to transfer the skills emphasised in prescriptive lessons to their writing and that grammar lessons had minimal effect on improving student writing.

As Murray (1972) noted, writing is often a demanding intellectual activity, and it is through the process of using language that individuals learn about the world. The writing process, according to the author, is categorised into three stages: (1) pre-writing – which

takes place before the first draft, (2) writing – where the first draft is produced and is a good indication of how little the writer knows and (3) re-writing – which involves the reconsideration of several aspects of writing including, but not limited to, the subject, form, and audience. The time spent on each stage is dependent on the writer. The ungraded portfolio used in this study aligned with the Process Theory of Writing because it recognised that writing is a process best done in a non-threatening environment.

For this study, ungrading was incorporated alongside the two existing approaches to teaching reading and writing – The Schema Theory of Reading and the Process Theory of Writing – to determine whether this would help students become better readers and writers.

Literature Review

The assessment of students' learning is considered an integral part of the educational process because it supports learners by giving them the opportunity to showcase their acquired skills and knowledge, while determining their achievements professionally, vocationally and academically (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014). Yet, assessments are often disliked by many students and instructors who view them as expensive, time-consuming, ineffective in supporting learning, biased, subjective, and a tool of oppression (Areekkhuzhiyil, 2019; Gibbs & Simpson, 2005). Unsurprisingly, given that student learning and development have been widely accepted as central to educational quality, student assessment and improvement of student performance have been the focus of many discussions and efforts at institutions of higher learning globally (Bain, 2010; Guo & Shi, 2016).

Grades and Grading

It would be almost impossible to focus on assessment without examining the matter of grades and grading. According to Guberman (2021), multi-interval grading schemes serve as the main representation of success or failure for students. Many students, according to Boatright-Horowitz and Arruda (2013), typically have a simplistic view of grades, traditionally perceiving them as either good or bad with no neutral categorization. They noted that the classification of good or bad varied from student to student but was influenced by several factors such as parenting, gender, socioeconomic status, and educational goals. Meanwhile, Taylor (2022) opined that the grades students receive often

reflect motivation, interest, and circumstances as much or sometimes even more than learning.

Bain (2010) warned of the drawbacks of making assessment primarily about grading and classification, indicating that it could inadvertently encourage students to study in negative ways. So instead of seeking to truly understand ideas, they may focus more on surface level learning instead. While some consider grades to be both necessary and useful, Blum and Kohn (2020) emphasised that conventional grading systems have been criticised for their failure to produce the desired outcome of learning. Grades, instead, tend to diminish students' interest in learning, while creating a preference for the easiest possible task and reducing the quality of students' thinking (Kohn, 2011). Therefore, it should not be a surprise that grade-oriented environments are often associated with increased levels of cheating (Anderman & Murdock, 2007).

In identifying the problem of using the college Grade Point Average (GPA) as a measure of cognitive skill development, Anaya (1999) noted that grades assigned to a student in a course do not usually consider the student's performance level at the start of the course. Consequently, the grades issued are usually normative and not criterion-based indicators of cognitive performance.

Ungrading and its benefits

Ungrading represents a concerted effort to move away from letter and number grades in favour of qualitative summaries of students' progress and could be implemented in several ways in an educational setting to the benefit of both students and teachers (Blum & Kohn, 2020; Kohn, 2011). According to Rapchak et al. (2023), ungrading represents a movement embraced by a growing number of instructors at all levels of the education system who view the grading process as disconnected and counterproductive to the learning goals they have set for their students.

Several scholars have highlighted the benefits of ungrading to both students and instructors. The students, according to Kohn (2011), can learn without the pressure of grades, while teachers are able to build better relationships with their students. Noting that ungrading was introduced in some universities as an immediate response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Ferns et al. (2021) described this trend as an important way of promoting a pedagogy of care. Further, Farland and Childs-Kean (2021) said students are less likely to

cheat when the stakes of grades are removed. In summary, although somewhat unconventional, ungrading is seen as being more beneficial to student learning and to their overall well-being since it encourages a pedagogical approach that is more equitable and inclusive (Kohn, 2011; Taylor, 2022).

Implementing Ungrading

Fully implementing ungrading in a formal education system that requires a letter grade at the end of the course could prove difficult, and to address this, scholars have adopted four different strategies to help determine a final letter grade for students within the ungrading framework. These are: the goal approach, the conference approach, the reflection approach, and a combination of all three (Newton et al., 2020).

In the goal approach, the student sets personal goals that align with the course objectives, and the student and instructor come to a consensus on what these goals are and the necessary correlating evidence. Each letter grade would have correlating evidence that the student will have to present. Meanwhile, in the conference approach, the student and instructor meet periodically throughout the semester to qualitatively assess the student's knowledge and application of the course content. During these conferences, teachers may make provisions for students to revise their work after receiving feedback. Together, the teacher and student reach a consensus on how best the student's performance could be represented by a letter grade. Meanwhile, the reflective approach involves student writing or discussion with their instructors about their learning at the end of the course. This may involve using different prompts. Of course, there is the option of using the combination of all three (Newton et al., 2020).

Instructors, according to Rapchak et al. (2023), could choose to implement ungrading throughout a course or for particular assignments. Noting that grades are typically assigned at the end of a course, they contended it is not necessary that the instructors give grades for each assignment and suggested this could be replaced with substantive feedback and dialogue, which encourage motivation and learning in students.

The Challenges with Ungrading

Ungrading, though, has its challenges. In response to concerns about the negative impact of grades on student learning and well-being from government and educational leaders in Singapore, McMorran and Ragupathi (2019) experimented with a gradeless

semester at the National University of Singapore. They found that while eliminating grades may reduce student stress and motivate them to take academic risks, staff were likely to disproportionately suffer due to structural impediments or personal pedagogical stances which viewed grades as essential for student motivation. Meanwhile, Dosmar and Williams (2022) noted a major drawback of ungrading is that some students may not take responsibility for their learning. Additionally, they contended that instructors may notice a bifurcated grade distribution with many students earning grades at the higher or lower ends of the spectrum (As, Bs, and Fs). Deciphering work in the middle ground, they noted, was more challenging. Meantime, Fern et al. (2021), while highlighting the positives of ungrading, especially in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, warned it would not fix many of the issues facing the education sector.

Although ungrading has been gaining popularity in tertiary institutions globally, it remains a relatively new practice at UG, especially in the English service courses. This study aims to record the experiences of students as they engage in this novel experience and its impact on developing their reading and writing skills. The findings, which capture the culmination of an Action Research Study, could contribute to overall staff development and help lecturers improve their practices (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015).

Methodology

For this study, a qualitative design was used. According to Plano Clark and Creswell (2015), researchers use qualitative designs when: (1) the research problem calls for exploration and understanding, (2) the purpose is general and broad, and (3) answers to open-ended research questions are being sought. Usher and Pajares (2008) noted that researchers have measured the sources of academic self-efficacy in different ways, including by qualitative inquiry only.

Setting

This study took place at UG's Turkeyen campus, where over 2,000 students enrol in the English service courses annually. The innovation was first implemented in the 6-week recess period of the 2021-2022 academic year and again in the first semester of the 2022-2023 academic year.

The Innovation

The innovation was the incorporation of an ungraded writing portfolio as an assessment tool in the online course, ENG 1105. It was used alongside other assessments, which included a reading comprehension test, an annotated bibliography, an essay outline, and a term paper.

Students were asked to create Google Documents which were used to respond to specific writing prompts assigned at different points in the course schedule. The first prompt was given a few weeks into the course and was a reading comprehension exercise where students were asked to identify examples of different rhetorical strategies used in an assigned literary essay. The second prompt was assigned to students during the middle of the course, and they were required to draft a thesis statement from assigned topics. For the third and final prompt, which was assigned shortly before the due date for the final paper, students were given the freedom to submit drafts of their term papers. Qualitative feedback was given – if the exercise was adequately done it would be returned with the remark “Complete” and if corrections were needed, the task was deemed as “Incomplete”, and students were asked to resubmit until it was satisfactorily done. Once at least two prompts were satisfactorily done, the full 10% participation grade was awarded to the student.

Population and Sample

Approximately 85 students who were enrolled in the researcher’s ENG 1105 class engaged in this innovation. While all the students participated in the course activities, including the assessments, they could decline to participate in the data collection process.

Following the conclusion of the course and the official release of grades, purposive sampling was done to select students for data collection. This approach allowed for the selection of the students who would best enable the research questions to be answered (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). Those selected had responded to all three journal prompts for the ungraded portfolio or had at least completed two prompts and had responded to the feedback given. This approach was utilised because it allowed the researcher to gather data from students who had fully engaged with the process of ungrading through the portfolio. In total, data were collected from five students who were on different academic paths. Some context is provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Personal Context of Participants

Student	Pseudonym	Program of Study	Context
Participant A	Mario	Business Economics	Doing course as an elective as part of accelerated study programme
Participant B	Camille	Public Communications	Repeating course after not achieving a passing grade in previous attempt
Participant C	Jason	Accounts	Mature working student doing course for the first time
Participant D	Abigail	Accounts	Recent high school graduate doing course for the first time.
Participant E	Unique	Accounts	Working student doing course for the first time

Data Collection

Three qualitative tools, as reflected in Table 2, were used to collect data to answer the two research questions. This was done to achieve method triangulation, which, according to Polit and Beck (2012), involves using multiple methods of data collection about the same phenomenon and is common in qualitative research.

Table 2
Qualitative Data Collection Tools Used

Data Tool	Details
Student Journal Responses	5 responses 6 prompts issued at the end of the course Participants purposefully sampled Written/Audio Text Data collected helped answer both RQs
One-on-one semi-structured interviews	4 interviews 20–30-minute interviews at the end of the course

	Interviewees purposefully sampled Data collected helped answer both RQs
Researcher Journal	Ongoing throughout study Field Observations Study Reflections Summaries Data collected helped contextualise data from student journals and interviews

Student Journal Responses

At the conclusion of the course, students were asked to respond to 6 reflective prompts in relation to ENG 1105 (see Appendix A). The prompts focused primarily on the course content and assessment. Students were allowed to respond to these prompts via email, text messages, or voice notes. Students who had actively engaged in the portfolio process (n=15) were emailed and invited to participate. A total of five students (n=5) responded to the prompts in student journals.

One of the key benefits of using journals is that it allows for the collection of contemporaneous data with limited encroachment on researcher time and inconvenience to participants (Girard, 1999). In this study, journals allowed students who wanted to participate in the study but who did not want to be interviewed the opportunity to share their thoughts on the course and the assessments. However, in this study, all students who completed the journal, with the exception of one, agreed to be interviewed.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews, between 20-30 minutes long, were conducted via Zoom with the students (n=4) who had agreed to participate in the study after being contacted via email. Once consent was given, these interviews were recorded (See Interview Protocol in Appendix B). Afterwards, these interviews were de-identified, transcribed, and sent to participants to verify their accuracy.

Semi-structured interviews, Plano Clark and Creswell (2015) asserted, are ideal for participants who are articulate and serve as the best way for researchers to gain insight into a person's experiences and perceptions. Similarly, Usher and Pajares (2008) noted the

value of using semi-structured interviews for gathering data on an individual’s academic self-perception since it allows the participants to elaborate on their significant experiences.

Researcher Journal

As the action researcher in this study, the researcher kept a journal capturing experiences in the course, particularly those relating to assessment. Initially, entries were made weekly, but these increased in frequency when grading assessments, including the portfolio submissions. Most of the entries were done using the Notes feature on the researcher’s mobile phone.

Keeping a researcher journal was advantageous primarily because it enabled the researcher to keep track of observations and thoughts as they unfolded. In the analysis stage, these observations were compared with the data collected from students in order to streamline the major themes that were identified.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews and journal entries were read repeatedly, then analysed manually using a systematic design, which Creswell and Guetterman (2019) noted is widely used in educational research. In this approach, initial coding was done for actions, which helps to curb the temptation to make conceptual leaps and to adopt existing theories before completing the necessary work (Charmaz, 2014). These codes were then compiled into larger, focused codes before being grouped into themes and supported with quotes from the original data. Memoing was done throughout the coding exercise. Examples of coding are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3
Sample of Data Analysis- Theme Generation

Data Collection Tool	Open/Initial Coding	Focused Code	Memo	Themes	Quotations
Interview	“Receiving Feedback”	Receiving feedback helped student with	Provides specific insight into how the feedback on	Ungrading Aids in the Learning Process but Students still	“I had a very big problem in terms of paraphrasing and not separating ideas. And through your

		organising writing	portfolio submission helped student and answers RQ1	Expect Quantitative Grades	feedback, I realised how big an issue it is and so I started to work and at least try to separate ideas, rather than to put three, four ideas into one paragraph. (Mario)
Researcher's Journal	"Clarifying Ungrading"	Clarifying the need for students to heed qualitative feedback in the absence of grades.	Helps to explain challenges students and lecturer faced in implementing the innovation and provides context for RQ1		"After completing grading of Portfolio Two, I sent a message via the Moodle platform reminding them to check for feedback and explained, once again, how ungrading works. I explained this again when I met them for class".
Student Journal	"Choosing own topics and writing is exciting"	Students are enjoying and benefitting from other course assessments.	Helps to convey how students perceive other assessments in the course and helps answer RQ2	The Course Assessments Help in Language Learning	"Being able to choose your own topic and write from your point of view was exciting." (Camille)
Interview	"Measuring reading skills accurately"	Reflecting reading ability of student	Student believes test accurately measured his reading ability. This helps to answer RQ2		"I would say that it measured my reading skills." (Mario)

Findings

The five themes identified during the qualitative data analysis obtained from the interviews and journals were: (1) feedback received on portfolio submissions when acted on was helpful in improving writing skills and language learning, (2) ungrading aids in the learning process but students still expect quantitative grades, (3) more ungraded work should be incorporated in the ENG 1105 course and other English courses, (4) the course assessments help in language learning, and (5) the manner in which the course is delivered influences student learning. The first three themes were applicable to RQ1 and the remaining two to RQ2.

Feedback Received on Portfolio Submissions when Acted on was Helpful in Improving Writing Skills and Language Learning

In response to RQ1, the students expressed their appreciation for the ungraded portfolio since it was an outlet that helped them to practice and improve their language skills. Receiving feedback on their portfolio work prior to final submissions was identified as a major benefit of the innovation since students could then incorporate this feedback to improve their writing and language skills needed for their final papers. By engaging in the portfolio, students specifically said they were able to improve their summary writing and paraphrasing skills, craft better thesis statements, cite and reference properly, and build their vocabulary.

Mario, in speaking about the benefit of the ungraded portfolio, said:

For me, I had a very big problem in terms of paraphrasing and not separating ideas. And through your feedback, I realised how big an issue it is and so I started to work and at least try to separate ideas, rather than to put three, four ideas into one paragraph.

Camille, on the other hand, remarked:

I was having a very hard time doing the thesis [statement] so when you gave us a chance to write the thesis [statement] on our own and actually helped us as we wrote it and sent it back to you, I got a better understanding of how to develop my thesis [statement].

While Unique wrote in her journal that the portfolio helped to broaden her vocabulary, Abigail recalled: “I learnt how to properly cite and reference my stuff that I

was taking from the internet and other places because I didn't know about that, but doing this course helped me to get the knowledge about that.”

Meanwhile, Jason said the feedback received on the submissions “was very helpful,” adding that it allowed students to adjust their work based on advice. According to him, the ungraded portfolio was “a more personal approach,” stating: “You would actually give us feedback on our thesis statement, you would give us feedback on whatever topic we chose, those things.” Similar sentiments were expressed by Camille, who indicated that students were able to “use that feedback to improve our final submission.”

However, several students did not review the feedback. Some did not resend revised portfolio entries, although they were asked, while others resubmitted work without being guided by the feedback. In the researcher's journal, one entry noted: “Student resubmitted portfolio assessment on thesis statement without adhering to any of the guidance provided. This is not an isolated case.” This underscored the importance of not only the lecturer giving feedback but of students being able to read, process, and act on feedback.

Ungrading Aids in the Learning Process but Students still Expect Quantitative Grades

All the participants identified ungrading as a novel experience that was beneficial. It was noted that being able to write without the threat of grades helped them to feel less pressured when completing writing tasks. Mario said:

Yeah, the portfolio was something that I really appreciated because of the fact that I've never really gotten an opportunity to write anything outside of it being graded. So, to just to write something, taking away the pressure of having to be assessed by it, but rather just, to just freely put your thoughts out in writing it really, it really [sic], helped me to not only not rush the work but I was able to look at what I was putting out, and analyse it a bit further to try to highlight some of the areas that I need to work on which you were able to highlight through the portfolio...

Camille said the manner in which the ungraded portfolio was incorporated in the course allowed her “the chance to actually do research” and “write on [her] own” since she was given the chance to write on a topic of her choice. The result was that she understood the topic better and did not feel pressured to submit perfect work every time since no grades were allocated.

Many students, however, were confused by the absence of a quantitative or letter grade on their portfolio submissions and emailed or queried this apparent anomaly. According to one entry in the researcher's journal: "Today three students emailed me saying they did not receive any grade for their portfolio submission." A subsequent entry stated: "After completing grading of Portfolio Two, I sent a message via the Moodle platform reminding them to check for feedback and explained once again how ungrading works. I explained this again when I met them for class."

The findings suggest that while ungrading has several positives on the learning process, it is a concept that will take some time for students to fully grasp because students are accustomed to receiving grades. Therefore, it may be necessary to regularly explain to students how the process will work in the course and to teach them how to interpret the feedback.

More Ungraded Work Should be Incorporated in the ENG 1105 Course and Other English Courses

Given their experience with the ungraded portfolio in this course, students suggested that more ungraded work should be incorporated into the course. When asked to suggest possible changes to ENG 1105, Abigail said: "Nothing much, but probably if there is ungraded work so that students can be able to practice and they can become more confident and better in whatever task is at hand, I should say."

Meanwhile, Jason recommended that the ungraded portfolio should be incorporated into other English courses, but said it may be challenging to do so because lecturers are already busy. However, he underscored the usefulness of the feedback given in the portfolio: "The portfolio is beneficial because you get your feedback. You know you're getting corrected. Feedback is good."

These responses indicate the ungraded portfolio is seen as a useful innovation that could be implemented more fully in ENG 1105, as well as other English courses. It is seen as an avenue that could build the confidence of students and provide opportunities for important feedback. However, it is viewed as a time-consuming initiative to properly implement.

The Course Assessments Help in Language Learning

In response to RQ2, there was consensus that the graded course assessments helped

develop the language skills of students, but there were differences in opinion as to whether the assessments enabled students to get an accurate gauge of their reading and writing skills. When it came to reading skills, Mario indicated that the course helped in developing his comprehension and analytical skills: “It helped me in terms of how I went about actually reading and analysing the comprehension passage.” He noted that prior to his experiences in this course, he would try to circumvent the reading process to his own detriment:

First, I used to read the question and try to answer the question without having to go through the entire passage, because of the length of the passage. However, through the course, I was able to see that not all times you'll be able to do that and gain a true understanding of what is being said in the passage. Going through the passage, reading it, looking for main ideas and putting it together, it helped a lot.

Camille noted in her student journal that the reading skills learnt in the course gave her “a better chance of understanding what I am reading.” She also felt the course helped improve her writing skills and challenged her to write with an open mind: “Before completing the summer course, it was challenging to write with an open mind. This is something I can proudly say I am able to do.”

Meanwhile, Mario said the course not only helped improve his writing skills but also increased his appreciation for writing. He said: “It was highly effective in improving my writing skills and it helped me to highlight some of my flaws. I think, generally, be a better writer, and have a greater appreciation for writing.” Overall, there was a strong consensus among the participants that the course helped them with their writing skills.

However, there were varying views about whether the assessments used accurately measured the skills of students, particularly when it came to reading. Mario indicated that while the score achieved on the reading comprehension assessment may have been an accurate assessment of their own reading ability, he contended that a test may not be an accurate way of measuring this skill in students. According to him, “I can see that not all times the assessments could be a true reflection of the student’s ability albeit for many reasons. Students might be dealing with their own personal issues at the time when that particular assessment is done.” To address this concern, it was suggested that there be a

longer timeframe for students to complete assessments and that other reading assessments be added, rather than just a single reading comprehension test.

The Manner in which the Course is Delivered Influences Student Learning

The way a course is taught plays an important role in the learning process. One student, Camille, who was repeating the course said, “I think for me, when I did the course for the first time in the first semester it was challenging because of the way my lecturer portrayed it.” The student also felt that the topics needed to be explained more thoroughly: “And I also think they should explain and expand a little bit more about the topics that they are teaching so that we can get a better understanding of it, because a lot of persons in first year were having a very hard time with English, and some of us failed it. So, it’s us understanding and the lecturers explaining.”

However, her second experience with the course was positive since she better understood the concepts, which led to an improved performance. She noted: “For the summer course I got to learn and understand even more what was being said and being taught. And it portrayed in my writing for every other course that I am doing right now. It is easier for me to write, and my thoughts flow easier and better.” Meanwhile, Mario, who was doing ENG 1105 for the first time, believed that the course met its objectives primarily “because of the way it was delivered”. He particularly appreciated being “allowed to write pieces” to get feedback stating that this allowed him the chance to see weak areas and improve.

Meanwhile, Jason compared his experiences with ENG 1105 with another English course that he was taking at the time. According to the student, “it wasn’t a stressful class, I think the format was nice. I dread going to the current English class,” adding “there is less practice, I should say with not much feedback. Yeah so, I don’t know. I don’t feel comfortable in the English class.”

These findings helped in answering RQ2 and underscore that assessments cannot be divorced from the actual instructional practices. It appears there is a need for constant evaluation of the teaching practices of lecturers within the Language Centre and incorporation of different strategies to suit different learning styles.

Discussion

The findings suggest that engaging in the ungraded portfolio is beneficial to students, even though these benefits may differ from student to student. Some students shared how engaging in the ungraded portfolio helped improve their comprehension skills, while others indicated how it aided them in formulating thesis statements, structuring essays, referencing, and other areas. The portfolio prompts, which provided students with practice work directly related to their other assessments in the course, such as their essay, seemed to be appreciated by students, who said the feedback helped them improve their work before making final submissions. As Farland and Childs-Kean (2021) argued, for true learning to occur, students should have the opportunity to fail before their performance is assessed, and the ungraded portfolio provided this avenue.

In the English classroom, when feedback is properly given and utilised, it could enhance the learning process and help improve students' language skills. However, for students to even have a chance to improve on their work before making final submissions, lecturers must give clear, helpful, and prompt feedback. The feedback given should adhere to the six best practices outlined by Gibbs and Simpson (2005) including that it should be received by the student and implemented.

However, while Black and Wiliam (1998) contended that the absence of grades usually resulted in students reading feedback more carefully to guide their learning, this study did not definitively support this assertion since several students did not even respond to requests to redo some of their submissions. Yet, there were many queries from students about the absence of a quantitative grade on their submissions. This suggests that many of the students still valued quantitative feedback more than qualitative feedback. This is not surprising because students have grown accustomed to quantitative feedback throughout their schooling.

On the other hand, there was enough evidence to suggest that the ungraded portfolio helped students sharpen their reading and writing skills and created a space for them to develop confidence in these areas. The fact that several of the participants called for more ungraded work to be implemented in ENG 1105 and in other English courses underscores the usefulness of the innovation.

Further, the results indicate that, for the most part, students believed the assessments used in ENG 1105 effectively assessed their reading and writing skills. This was mainly because students felt they were adequately prepared for these assessments by the practice work in tutorials and the portfolio submissions.

Overall, students preferred the individual assignments, such as the essay outline and the essay, rather than group assignments or timed tests. Students indicated an aversion to group work and felt that awarding the same grade to all group members did not accurately capture individual contributions. On the other hand, a timed reading comprehension test over a two-hour period, where the student is given a passage never seen before, was considered slightly unfair since there are several factors, such as the test taker's physical and mental health, that could negatively affect their performance in those circumstances.

The general appreciation by students for the current methods of assessment used in ENG 1105 supports the suggestion by Poindexter et al. (2015) that assessments such as the ungraded portfolio could be used alongside more traditional assessments to help teachers better gauge gaps in student learning, and guide course and curriculum design, as well as to encourage learning that is beneficial beyond the classroom. Therefore, it does not appear necessary to completely overhaul the methods of assessments in the ENG 1105 course, but instead to introduce minor changes to augment what is already working.

On the other hand, adding another assessment, such as an ungraded portfolio, would significantly increase the time the lecturers would have to spend grading and giving feedback, which is unsustainable given the large student numbers. This is already a global problem that needs addressing, as Gibbs and Simpson (2005) opined. Therefore, it may be necessary to assign lecturers smaller classes or to employ properly trained grading/teaching assistants.

Conclusion

This study provides evidence that action research can be used by lecturers in a tertiary setting to explore and come up with innovative solutions to deal with existing challenges in their settings. The study shows that while students found the methods of assessments used in the ENG 1105 course at UG to be effective and accurate measurements

of their abilities, they considered the ungraded portfolio to be a worthwhile innovation that helped improve their reading and writing skills because it offered them the opportunity to receive feedback in a personalised, non-threatening way. Therefore, the success of the ungraded portfolio is largely predicated on the delivery of clear and timely feedback, which the students consider and implement.

Overall, this study could have significant implications for the way the lecturers within the Language Centre at UG approach teaching and assessing students in the future, with the possible incorporation of ungraded work in the English service courses. This could be a gradual process initiated by the inclusion of one piece of ungraded work in the course, as suggested by Rapchak et al. (2023). On the other hand, the Language Centre members could take the bold step of engaging in the holistic process of ungrading.

References

- Anaya, G. (1999). College impact on student learning: Comparing the use of self-reported gains, standardized test scores, and college grades. *Research in Higher Education*, 40(5), 499-526. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1018744326915>
- Anderman, E.M., & Murdock, T.B. (2007). The psychology of academic cheating. In E.M. Anderman & T.B. Murdock (Eds.), *Psychology of academic cheating* (pp.1-5). Elsevier Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-012372541-7/50002-4>
- An, S. (2013). Schema theory in reading. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3(1), 130–134. <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.1.130-134>
- Arekkuzhiyil, S. (2019). Assessment practices in higher education: Myths and realities. *University News*, 57(11), 18-20.
- Ashford-Rowe, K., Herrington, J., & Brown, C. (2014). Establishing the critical elements determine authentic assessment. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 39(2), 205-222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2013.819566>
- Axelrod, R. (1973). Schema theory: An information processing model of perception and cognition. *The American Political Science Review*, 67(4), 1248–1266. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1956546>
- Bain, J. (2010). Integrating student voice: Assessment for empowerment. *Practitioner Research in Higher Education*, 4(1), 14-29.
- Bell, E. (2021). Participation grades: An argument for self-assessments, the potential to

- reproduce inequalities, and preventive suggestions. *Teaching Philosophy*, 44(4), 449–485. <https://doi.org/10.5840/teachphil2021518146>
- Black, P. & Wiliam, D. (1998). Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80(2), 139–148.
- Blum, S.D. & Kohn, A. (2020). *Ungrading: Why rating students undermines learning (and what to do instead)*. West Virginia University Press.
- Boatright-Horowitz, S, L. & Arruda, C. (2013). College students' categorical perceptions of grades: It's simply "good" vs. "bad". *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 38(3), 253–259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2011.618877>
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Collins, T.F. (2013). *Major theories of teaching writing: An overview*. [Unpublished master's thesis]. Morehouse State University.
- Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C. (2019). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (6th ed.). Pearson.
- Czekanski, K., & Wolf, Z. (2013). Encouraging and evaluating class participation. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.53761/1.10.1.7>
- Dosmar, E. & Williams, J. (2022). Ungrading assessment practices. *The National Teaching & Learning Forum*, 31(5), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ntlf.30333>
- Farland, M.Z & Childs-Kean, L, M. (2021). Stop tempting your students to cheat. *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning*, 13(6), 588-590. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2021.01.035>
- Ferns, S., Hickey, R., Williams, H. (2021). Ungrading, supporting our students through a pedagogy of care. *International Journal for Cross-Disciplinary Subjects in Education*, 12(2). 4500-4504. <https://doi.org/10.20533/ijcdse.2042.6364.2021.0550>
- Gibbs, G. & Simpson, C. (2005). Conditions under which assessment supports students' learning. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, 1, 3-31.
- Girard, T. C. (1999). Interns' perceptions of internships: A look at work, supervision and appraisals. *The Journal of Cooperative Education*, 34(3), 42-48.
- Guberman, D. (2021). Student perceptions of an online ungraded course. *Teaching and*

- Learning Inquiry*, 9(1), 86–98.
<https://doi.org/10.20343/TEACHLEARNINQU.9.1.8>
- Guo, F. & Shi, J. (2016). The relationship between classroom assessment and undergraduates' learning within Chinese higher education system. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(4), 642– 663.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.942274>
- Holly, C., Porter, S., Vitale, T. R., & Echevarria, M. (2024). Grading participation in the classroom: The assumptions, challenges, and alternatives. *Teaching and Learning in Nursing*, 19(1), 27- 33. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teln.2023.06.020>
- Kivunja, C., & Kuyini, A. B. (2017). Understanding and applying research paradigms in educational contexts. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(5), 26-41.
<https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v6n5p26>
- Kohn, A. (2011). The case against grades. *Educational Leadership*, 63(3), 28-33.
- Li, J. & Zang, L. (2016). The application of schema theory to English reading teaching in junior high school. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 13(1), 14–21.
<https://doi.org/10.17265/1539-8072/26.01.003>
- McMorran, C., & Ragupathi, K. (2019). The promise and pitfalls of gradeless learning: responses to an alternative approach to grading. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44(7), 925–938. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1619073>
- Mertler, C.A. (2020). *Action research: Improving schools and empowering educators* (6th ed.). Sage Publications Inc.
- Murray, D.M. (1972). Teach writing as a process not product. *The Leaflet*, 71, 11-14.
- Newton, J.R., Williams, M.C., & Feeney, D.M. (2020). Implementing non-traditional assessment: Opportunities and challenges. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 3(1), 39-51. <https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.03.01.3>
- Plano Clark, V.L. & Creswell, J.W. (2015). *Understanding research: A consumer's guide*. Pearson.
- Poindexter, K., Hagler, R., & Lindell, D. (2015). Designing authentic assessment strategies for nurse education. *Nurse Educator*, 40(1), 36-40.
<https://doi.org/10.1097/NNE.0000000000000091>
- Polit, D.F., & Beck, C.T. (2012). *Nursing research: Generating and assessing evidence for nursing practice* (9th ed.). Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

- Precourt, E., & Gainor, M. (2018). Factors affecting classroom participation and how participation leads to a better learning. *Accounting Education*, 28(1), 100–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639284.2018.1505530>
- Rapchak, M, Hands, A.S., & Hensley, M. K. (2023). Moving toward equity: Experiences with ungrading. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 64(1), 89–98. <https://doi.org/10.3138/JELIS-2021-0062>
- Rasakumaran, A., & Patrick, J.J. (2019). Schema theory and cognition aspects of reading. *ISOR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 24(4). 26-30. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2404032630>
- Reither, J.A. (1985). Writing and knowing: Toward redefining the writing process. *College English*, 47(6), 620-628.
- Rose, P. (2016). A case for academic literacies: Informed needs analysis. *The UWI Quality Education Forum*, 1(21), 42-62.
- Rose, P.V. & Sookraj, R. (2015). Needs analysis: Undergraduates' evaluation of a university- wide English language course. *Caribbean Educational Research Journal*, 3(2), 62-75.
- Shen, Y. (2008). An exploration of schema theory in intensive reading. *English Language Teaching* (Toronto), 1(2), 104–107. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v1n2p104>
- Taylor, K.L. (2022). The pandemic and pedagogy experimentation: The benefits of ungrading. In J.S. Lantis (Ed.), *Active learning in political science for a post-pandemic world: From triage to transformation* (pp.79-93). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-94713-2_6
- Usher, E.L. & Pajares, F. (2008). Sources of self-efficacy in school: Critical review of the Literature and future directions. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(4), 751-796. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308321456>
- Wilkinson, C. (2011). Against the grain: A window to curriculum reform in language education at the tertiary level. *The UWI Quarterly Education Forum*, 17(1), 53-73.

Dr. Mark Alastair Mc Gowan teaches English Language and Literature at the University of Guyana. He holds a B.A. in English (University of Guyana), an M.A. in Mass Communications (University of Leicester, UK) and an Ed.D. in Leadership and Innovation (Arizona State University). His research interests include the role of media in shaping national identity, satire in newspaper cartoons, heroism, and assessment practices.

**A Tribute to Professor Loncke (2021),
A Selection of Poems from *Bone Flute Music*, & A Reflective Essay**

Gentian Miller

For Professor Loncke

A quiet art of persuasion, she was.
Professor walked the university campus, tall
a distinguished revolutionary for years.

The epitome of grace
welded to African consciousness.
Her outstanding Afro, tie-dyed skirts,
leather sandals.
Remarkable ensemble.

When I last visited her
Her Afro had become
beautiful corn-row braids.
She wore polished finger-nails
Fiery red.

Because she was always
admired and loved,
it was easy to sing her a wealth of songs
while visiting
triggering memories of days
filled with music, song, and energy.

Had asked her once, mischievously,
What's in your beautiful handbag?
"Love letters," she said.

Worthing Beach

Taking ritual walks
Squelching sand between her toes
Sitting on coral reefs
Anka scrubs her feet
Washes her hair.

Her shredded list of hurts
The ocean carries away.
The sea grape trees are witnesses.

Co-Pilot to Lethem

Leaving Ogle behind,
flying high above the forest,
the pilot is whispering invocations.
Hawk-eyed and with auto-pilot on,
he scribbles reports.
His numbers, fractions and angles
are like street corners and place names.

From the corner of my eye
I observe the Demerara River,
the Linden Highway
And I gaze below
at spider threads of roads
silvery translucent footpaths
left by snails
criss-crossing on the forest floor.
Further along are bauxite mining outfits,
gold mining operations
timber harvesting concessions
But my eyes burn when I see
that the Essequibo River
is discoloured in some stages.
Polluted from mining.

Some say the river will heal itself
But I ask: What are we leaving for our children's children?

Where the River Meets the Ocean

When the tide comes in again at the Kingston shore
I will listen for the murmuring
soft splashing notes,
washing up in Dutch bottles bobbing on sea-waves.

And I will raise my kite again
attach a note to the mounting string
put my ears to the string
and get lost in the music of the singing-engine.

And when the Demerara glimmers in the moonlight
I will stand on the jetty
looking for the silhouette on the river's face
because rivers and oceans are great companions.

A Gon Dance Yuh!

Words try to grasp experience
as butterfly comes into view.

We are dancing
to Ferró music in Nappi.
He swings me
in swift drunken arcs.
And I do two steps to the left,
two to the right,
hoping to anchor him.
But he's stamping on my toes!

I ask to sit this one out,
But he insists that there is no "next" one.
I soon realize that this is a circle.
It's dance till you drop!

Butterfly quickly slips from his grasp
and gets lost in the crowd.

Essequibo Girls

Mornings were made for
wading in the river, bathing, swimming
then sitting on the steps of the jetty
threading stories.

Randomly stringing beads,
looking for a “fit-in” space,
you gently slip your special bead in place.
These threaded tales we proudly wear.

Then we challenge each other
to climb the wooden pole
anchoring the boat.
We are jumping and grabbing the pole
swinging our bodies like lizards
hanging up-side-down, like mermaids
with feet firmly clasped at the top of the pole.

While snapping pictures,
the rotting pole snapped.
Somebody shouted: “She broke the pole”.
That’s another story!

Twilight at Kitty Foreshore

I kicked stones and collected shells
while the orange glow fell below the horizon.
My cousins,
had gone in the opposite direction.
I washed my feet while walking along the stone jetty.

Forty years later,
I am admiring the same sunset.
The wind is still cutting through the salt-air
whistling in my ear and smacking my cheeks.
My fluttering skirt
anchored by folded legs
restrains an exhibition of thigh and thighs.

While a lone windsurfer struggles to stay upright,
incoming waves erase a child’s drawings in the sand.

Bara-Bara Creek (*Essequibo*2)

Tonight the Essequibo creeps up silently
hugging the planked jetty.
Mangrove roots struggle
against the washing tide
that chomps away at the river bank.

As the tide rises
Eleck's fire burns
with a soothing warm glow.
The pyramid of logs gently collapses
into the centre of the fire.
Flaming tongues blaze
sparks of shooting stars
take off on a trajectory.
Tendrils of wispy smoke
rise to meet the hazy blue sky

Croaking frogs and chirping crickets,
sing welcoming the high tide.
The suddenly submerged wooden bridge
straddles Bara-Bara Creek.

On Becoming a Guyanese Poet

My poems reflect my life's journeys and are infused with Guyana's jungle landscape. I lived my formative years in the mining town of Linden, sixty-five miles up the Demerara River, then relocated to Georgetown, where the Demerara empties into the vast Atlantic. I continue to live in Georgetown but navigate to different destinations. My poems convey truths about navigating challenging terrains and human experiences. The ever-present Demerara River, the hills, and the green valleys of Wismar infuse my childhood consciousness. I have spent time in other river communities in Guyana – Plantation Ross, and Blairmont in West Berbice; Lethem and Nappi in Rupununi; Port Kaituma, Kabakaburi, and Shell Beach in the Barima/Waini region; and Saxacalli and Lima on the Essequibo River.

I also gain inspiration from travelling to other destinations and observing the way of life of native peoples, such as in Porto Velho, Brazil; Taos Pueblo, New Mexico; the remains of the Maya civilization at Caracol and the Actun Tunichil Muknal caves in Belize, and the Tikal pyramid in Guatemala. My first collection of poems, which won a Guyana Prize for Literature Special Prize in 2006, is aptly titled, *Roots, Roads and Rivers*.

Reflecting on my writing, I realize that poems come to me as gestation; the writing process is always challenging; poems never arrive fully formed. My writing progresses from the germination of ideas and experiences. Composing poetry is also often a solitary vocation. On watching the burning of logs in a fire lit by an Amerindian caretaker one evening at Saxacalli, I wrote brief notes on gazing for hours at the fire. This became a poem that captures my writing process as it metaphorically pairs the emergence of poems with burning fire:

In the embers
I see stories that were once told
stories waiting to be born
some are stillborn
but most will live and die.
Some will experience rebirth.
Like candle-flies,
they light our way.

Creating poems involves sculpting the rough edges, removing the overwritten parts, using language devices to present imagery, asking rhetorical questions, editing, and remaining true to the germ of an idea you quickly scribbled on notepads. Some ideas and thoughts are elusive.

There are few poetry mentors in Guyana, and being an aspiring female poet did not help. However, while studying for my M.A. in English, Alim Hosein, senior lecturer at the University of Guyana and an expert in Language and Linguistics, became my mentor. Al Creighton, another senior lecturer, read my first poems and pronounced that they were merely statements. I am still smarting from those comments. Dr. Rupert Roopnarine, Guyanese poet and professor of Comparative Literature, gave advice and later drew lines through all my first drafts of poems. This was a necessary, painful stage of poetry writing.

A writer needs to obtain expert advice; someone must provide the harsh but constructive criticism regarding the merits and demerits of your writing. If you can pick yourself up after Dr. Roopnarine's kind of criticism, you will succeed. You will take what remains of your writing and return to the writing task, something Dr. Wilson Harris, a prominent Guyanese writer, describes as "infinite rehearsals." There is no immediacy with crafting poetry. I find quiet places in nature and devote time and energy to the task.

Over time, and revisiting river catchments or creeks on the Soesdyke-Linden Highway, rough notes and corrections began taking shape, and I honed my craft to perfection. The raw materials of my first poem were my recollections of coming to consciousness after a near-death experience by drowning, while on a tour with students at Emerald Tower Resort, Madewini Creek, on the Linden highway. Because I struggled to fill a void in my memory, and because there remains no rational explanation for drowning in a black-water creek in the Guyana jungle, and returning to the surface unaided and unconscious, I began writing to record a new lease on life. The intense experience of oxygen deprivation and coming back to consciousness after several hours is transcendental. Besides the literal story, my near-death experience was profoundly psychological. My poem, "Emerald Tower 1999," enquired into the nature of life, death, and rebirth. Many of my subsequent poems explore the same significant theme, probing the nature of death and life, trauma and healing.

My poems may not always offer answers, but they invite the reader to participate in vicarious experiences, feel the tensions, and share in a myriad of possibilities. Some of my poems emerge as gems of healing. They celebrate life, and I enjoy polishing poems until they become pearls. My subjects for poetry can vary from enigmatic characters, events, or experiences to brooding over life's injustices. My poems often capture a striking feature of a landscape, riverscape, or environmental beauty or degradation. Some poems investigate how memory and creativity work. My writing probes thresholds of what was said, what is remembered, what is reported, and the efficiency of language use, both standard English and Guyanese. Some poems explore Guyanese mythology, unconscious acts, and presences.

Finding a sanctuary in nature is necessary for poetry writing. Deep concentration allows me to recognize differences in tones, moods, and voices so that I represent faithfully

what the inspiration, muse, delivers. I manage a deft balance of standard English and Guyanese Creole. There are times when I try to hurry the germination of ideas and the birth of poems, but this manipulation does not succeed. Poems visit me, I interact with them, try them out, write drafts, discard drafts, and return to the task of writing. I use metaphors to apprehend the forgotten and the remembered.

Perhaps, a philosophy informs my writing, and it is the philosophy of existence. I investigate the nature of being as I continue to create my essence. The geography of Guyana – its rivers, creeks, mountains, jungles, and waterfalls – is my expansive canvas, and I am often engaged in understanding what constitutes reality. I am convinced that all of nature is alive, and we only need to establish a particular tuning to tap into nature. My strongest examples are the poems of Martin Carter, Derek Walcott, and Lorna Goodison. I admire the works of Modern poets T.S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats. Wilson Harris' novels fuel my imagination. I explore the nature of being and human experience. I have written two substantial books of poetry: *Roots, Roads and Rivers* (2006) and *Bone Flute Music* (unpublished). My task now is to have the second collection published.

Dr. Gentian Miller teaches at the University of Guyana. Her poetry collection *Roots, Roads, and Rivers* (2006) won a Guyana Prize for Literature Award. She has written on Wilson Harris, Educational Technology, African survivals, and other cultural art forms in Guyana. She performs folk songs with the Korokwa Singers.

Investigating Vocabulary Approaches within the Context of Reading Comprehension: Insights into Teachers' Instructional Practices at the Primary Level

Elsa Cromarty Hosein

Abstract

Research has soundly established the integral role vocabulary knowledge plays in the effective development of reading comprehension skills. Yet, little has been documented on how vocabulary instruction among Guyanese teachers at the primary level meets generally accepted standards that support the reading comprehension capabilities of especially struggling readers. This study examined how twenty-two teachers treated vocabulary instruction, which is fundamental to reading comprehension. Adopting a qualitative approach, the data were extracted from focus group interviews with eight graduate teachers, along with lesson plans from fourteen graduate and undergraduate teachers, and the national curriculum guides. The analysis of the data revealed that teachers' vocabulary instruction did not fully facilitate reading comprehension - such instruction was largely incidental and followed the traditional dictionary and meaning routine. The results also indicate that teachers need professional development sessions that squarely address instructional strategies focused on the teaching of vocabulary and its significance to reading comprehension.

Keywords: vocabulary, vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, lesson plans, curriculum guides

Introduction

Beck, McKeown, and Omanson (1987) once asked the question: "... are people good comprehenders because they know a lot of words, or do people know a lot of words because they are good comprehenders and in the course of comprehending text, learn a lot of words?" (p.147). Whether good comprehension emerges because of acquiring a robust knowledge of words or words are acquired incidentally because of good comprehension, there is no denying the correlation between vocabulary and comprehension. Words embody thought and expression, and thus, are essential in constructing meaning from text. For reasons such as this, instructional practices in vocabulary become critical in supporting learners to master vocabulary skills, which is vital in expanding reading comprehension.

While internationally, research on vocabulary instruction has informed and contributed to the modification of practices in the teaching of vocabulary, little has been documented in the Guyana context about the instructional practices used by teachers and

the advances in the teaching of vocabulary, if any, among teachers at the primary level. The researcher has observed during practicum supervision that instruction in vocabulary was minimal as teachers often opted to focus their instruction on other aspects of the language arts curriculum, such as grammar and writing. Why were teachers avoiding such an essential element in their teaching? There exists a gap in knowledge about how Guyanese teachers treat vocabulary instruction – their beliefs about vocabulary, and the role it plays in the development of reading comprehension, as well as the instructional challenges they encounter as teachers as they attempt to meet the requirements of best practices. Understanding teachers’ instructional practice in vocabulary in our primary schools is a matter that warrants an investigation to understand the preparational needs of teachers in the educational system.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers at the primary-school level in Guyana treat vocabulary instruction, which is fundamental to reading comprehension. Hence, the questions that guided the study were:

1. What was teachers’ fundamental understanding of vocabulary and its connection to reading comprehension?
2. How did teachers deliver instruction in the teaching of vocabulary?
3. How were teachers challenged in the delivery of vocabulary instruction?
4. What were the teachers’ perceived needs in the delivery of vocabulary instruction?

Literature review

Connecting Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension

Over the years, research has documented the associations between vocabulary and reading comprehension and has determined that a foundation of rich vocabulary knowledge ensures readers access to meaning while reading. Richek (2005) asserted that capturing and establishing the meaning of vocabulary is a basis for reading accomplishment. Nagy (1988) posited that “one cannot understand text without knowing what most of the words mean” (p. 9). Studies have conclusively determined that a sizeable word knowledge assures achievement in proficient reading for a lifetime (Biemiller and Boote, 2006; Dagnaw, 2023; Nagy, 1988; Marzano, 2020; Yildirim et al., 2011).

Readers with limited vocabulary knowledge in their repertoire are often deterred by their inability to fluidly engage text, unlike accomplished readers. Studies have indicated that the latter may

indirectly acquire new words into their word bank because of their existing word deposits - navigating print becomes easy and is an encouraging endeavour for them. The dynamics of this exchange speak to the concept of reciprocity, where, by reading texts, skilled readers can build on vocabulary knowledge both incrementally and incidentally because they are motivated to read (Nagy, 2005). In such a process, word knowledge and reading comprehension interact to further expand vocabulary. Hence, there is a tenable link between vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Vocabulary knowledge allows readers to access linguistic frameworks of texts. Semantic knowledge, which is the basis of background knowledge, impacts reading comprehension (Moghadam, Zainal, & Ghadepour, 2012). Hence, background knowledge is a key element used by proficient readers to access text. Elbro and Buch-Iversen (2013) suggested that failure to activate relevant, existing background knowledge may be a cause of poor reading comprehension (p. 435). Previous knowledge allows readers to make connections between words that they know and the new words they encounter, to create meaning through a system of semantic mapping. Harvey and Goudvis (2000) posited that background knowledge initiates the connections made by readers. Readers may only interface with new words within the semantic construct of familiar words. Therefore, vocabulary knowledge assists readers to enter texts by drawing from a reservoir of semantic knowledge.

In addition, good readers have acute phonological decoding skills, which they use to interpret texts while reading (Moody et al., 2018). These skills develop as a child's vocabulary develops. With the accumulation of new words, adept readers are prompted to make phonemic distinctions to decode more complex new words (Lund et al., 2014). The foundation of a large existing vocabulary allows them to separate and reform units of sound as they tap into their phonological awareness of words. It is such awareness and skill that facilitate the learning of new words that boost reading comprehension.

Teachers and Vocabulary Instruction

While research has robustly established that there is a correlation between vocabulary and comprehension, studies also show that the role instruction plays in connecting these two components is not so clearly defined: the long and short-term impact that instruction has on learning cannot easily be pinpointed. Stahl and Fairbanks (1986) explained that the nature of the relationship between the teaching of word meanings and growth in reading comprehension skill is “unclear” (p. 72). The National Reading Panel (2000) also reported its inability to find the “causal link” between teaching and learning vocabulary and reading comprehension and concluded that it is “difficult to demonstrate that teaching vocabulary improves reading ability” (p. 15). Researchers have also tendered questions

on the extent to which instruction on word knowledge would impact reading comprehension. To date, studies have yet to ascertain the impact of instruction in vocabulary. Wright and Cervetti (2016) contended that this is so because the nature of the relationship is one that is not fully understood (p. 204).

Teachers' approaches to instruction in vocabulary also pose some concerns. For years, teachers' instructional practices in vocabulary could generally be described as superficial. Bromley (2004) characterised traditional techniques in vocabulary instruction as either "*assign, define and test*" or "*identify, discuss or assume*" which involved the use of "word lists, dictionary definitions, and discussion" (p. 3). Amidst these concerns, McKeown (2019) asserted that teachers allocated minimal instructional time to vocabulary instruction. In addition, research has pointed to teachers' expressed insecurity in the teaching of vocabulary. This lack of confidence ranged from determining effective instructional practice to managing appropriate word selection and word focus (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008). These issues point to teachers' preparation being critical to enabling effective instructional practice that facilitates vocabulary and comprehension.

Effective vocabulary instruction is also dependent on teachers' vision and understanding of purpose. Teachers need clear purposes for the content of their instruction. A set purpose assists in determining clear instructional goals and lesson focus (Fisher & Frey, 2011). However, research has concluded that teachers' perspectives about vocabulary were limited to the demands of the classroom, hence, obscuring the purpose of instruction. Watts (1995) determined in a study of Grades 5 and 6 teachers that they considered vocabulary knowledge as a means to an end and only used instruction in vocabulary as a pre-reading activity. She also noted that teachers relied on the guidance provided by manuals.

Manuals and Lesson Plans

In a study of teachers' adherence to basal manuals, which play a similar role as the curriculum guides used in Guyana, Durkin (1984) observed that, as it relates to reading comprehension, manuals suggest that new vocabulary be introduced in context (p. 732). However, she found that the structural nature of the guides limited the scope to develop vocabulary within the context of reading comprehension. She concluded that "little or no time went to new vocabulary, background information, or pre-reading questions..." (p. 742). This finding might account for teachers' treatment of vocabulary and reading comprehension. However, later studies countered Durkin's conclusion with the proposition that teachers were well-aware of the shortcomings of these guides and adjusted

in their teaching where necessary (Bauman & Heubach, 1996; Shake & Allington, 1985). Therefore, examination of teachers' approach to vocabulary instruction and their use of supporting material is critical for ensuring that meaningful instruction occurs in the classroom.

Vocabulary Instruction for Reading Comprehension

While it has been noted that research has yet to single out the causal link between instruction and comprehension, current studies advocate multiple interventions and word-learning opportunities for the effective acquisition of vocabulary knowledge to advance reading comprehension (Sparapani et al., 2018). Researchers such as Moody et al. (2018) also highly recommend strategies "...based on theoretical 'frameworks' and 'tools' that would assist learners to develop vocabulary knowledge across contexts" (p. 3). However, there is a paucity of research to prove the effects, especially of the latter.

More specific instructional approaches are also recommended. Using more direct and explicit instruction, some proponents for vocabulary instruction advise more vigour in delivery. Bromley (2004) suggested that teachers should model new word-learning strategies so that learners may apply them to any reading circumstance (p. 6). In addition to introducing words within meaningful contexts and explanations, Biemiller (2003) recommended that learners must also be taught to "ask about words they don't know..." (p. 16) as they are taught to be accountable for acquiring knowledge about new words.

Devoting time and establishing meaningful routine practices are essential to developing a rich vocabulary and reading comprehension regimen. The teaching of vocabulary cannot be left to chance or as something enjoyed by only those with the necessary aptitude to engage with text. Teachers must have the exposure that will support their development of new strategies and sound knowledge and awareness of the significance and possible impact of instruction on vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension.

Method

Participants

Data from a total of twenty-two participants were used in this study and drawn from both trained graduate and undergraduate teachers from primary schools across the country. Trained Graduates are teachers who have attained a bachelor's degree in education. Trained undergraduate teachers are those who were certified teachers after undergoing teacher

training at the teacher education college before commencing their bachelor's in education. Eight teachers were interviewed in two groups of 4 each, while lesson plans from 14 other teachers were analysed. All the participants were actively involved in the school system.

Methodology

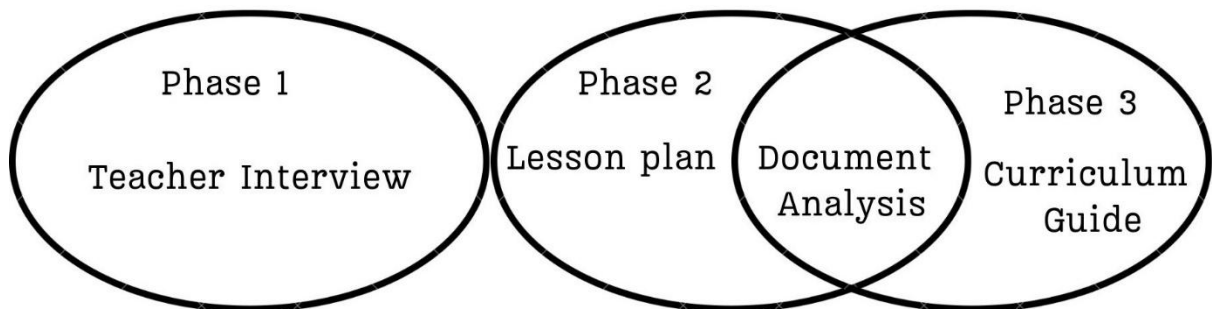
This phenomenological study investigated how teachers treat vocabulary instruction. The perspectives and practices of primary-school teachers in their delivery of vocabulary instruction were sought in order to gain critical insights into their knowledge, experience, and perceptions about vocabulary instruction and related classroom practices. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) elucidated that phenomenology attempts to explain the lived experience and interpretation of events as shared by a sample of people connected to the said events.

In keeping with this qualitative research paradigm, a descriptive approach was used to make meaning of the data presented. This stance narrates existing characteristics without defining either causal or effectual relationships (Hale, 2018) and significantly increases knowledge of the occurrences in the learning environment that should inform educators and the crafters of policies.

Design

Using convenience sampling, the data were gathered from three sources – interviews, lesson plans, and the national curriculum - in three phases. This triangulation design was used in order to ensure the validity of the investigation (Cohen et al., 2018) and signalled what is expected in credible research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Moreover, the use of multiple sources brought deeper insights into the context of teachers' instructional practices. As can be noted in Figure 1, this design placed interviews with teachers adjacent to the tools with which they work and covered the parameters within which teachers exercise their trade.

Figure 1
The data collection sequence



Note: The figure shows the sequence of the collection of data.

Interviews

In the initial phase, eight Trained Graduate primary-school teachers were interviewed in two separate groups. The purpose of the interviews was to gather initial information about teachers' insights into vocabulary instruction. The participants were told that the researcher wanted to learn about their experiences in teaching vocabulary in the classroom. The information that was gathered presented themes for the examination of the lesson plans.

The interview has the value of extracting the mindset or personal experience of the subject. Consequently, it is useful in gaining relevant perspectives within a context (McGrath et al., 2018). Further, instead of proffering speculations, interviews are more desirable when striving to obtain personal insights (Rahman, 2016). It is in this context that a semi-structured interview routine was designed. Such a format maximises the exchanges between all parties involved in the process (Winwood, 2019). Moreover, the option of a focus group interview extends the substance of data collection: this form of interview is noted to produce comprehensive information. The prompts used in the focus group interview are as follows:

- Perceptions of vocabulary instruction
- Beliefs about vocabulary instruction
- Goals for vocabulary instruction
- Frequency of instruction

Investigating Vocabulary Approaches

- Strategies to support the development of word knowledge
- Strategies to facilitate reading comprehension
- Examples of skill development activities
- Effectiveness of instruction
- Concerns about vocabulary teaching

Lesson Plans

In the second phase, the lesson plans from fourteen trained primary-level teachers were analysed - eight were Trained Graduates, while the remaining six were trained teachers who were enrolled in the undergraduate education programme. Originally, a random evaluation of at least five lessons per participant was planned in the research design. However, an initial review of lesson plans revealed that vocabulary lessons were not planned weekly, especially at the upper grade levels. Consequently, the researcher had to examine the vocabulary lessons as they appeared in lesson plans over an academic year. These amounted to fifty-two plans.

The merit given to documents as credible resources paved the way for teachers' lesson plans and the national curriculum guides for language arts to be examined in this research. Documents unveil patterns and trends of practice. They offer information that is constant. Bowen (2009) asserted that the analysis of documents has the distinct value of presenting "...empirical data as part of a process that is unobtrusive and nonreactive" (p. 38). This means that information contained within documents remains unchanging and unaffected by the research process. Moreover, documents can reveal the ideology, policies, intent, and even attitudes of an institution. Lesson plans prepared by teachers are generally based on the information provided by the national curriculum guide.

Curriculum guides

Finally, the curriculum guides from levels 2 to 6 were used as the source documents from which the instructional targets were derived. The focus in this phase was to review the stated objectives for vocabulary instruction and related student activities.

The national curriculum guide is the official document that reflects the scope and sequence of the content to be delivered to students at the respective levels in the school system. It should be noted that after this research was completed, a new curriculum guide was formally introduced to the school system by the Ministry of Education. It is a work in

progress as teachers make the transition to this new document. Also, post-COVID, a guide intended to help teachers fill the gaps caused by learning loss was introduced.

Analysis and Discussion

The interviews with the focus group yielded information on perceptions about vocabulary and vocabulary instruction, strategies for vocabulary instruction, some of the challenges the teachers face, and the instructional needs of the teachers.

Perceptions and Instructional Practice

Teachers' treatment of vocabulary instruction followed traditional approaches to the development of vocabulary. The primary focus of their instruction was on words and meanings. Approximately half of the interviewees viewed instruction on word and word meaning as essential, while the remaining teachers suggested that word structure, meaning in context, and using words correctly were relevant. Consequently, the trend when teachers were discussing the goals of their instruction was mainly to develop knowledge of target words, make sentences with the target words, and define words using the dictionary. Participant "Katie", a Grade 5 teacher, described the goals of her instructional practice thus: "I would let the children know this is a means of widening their knowledge when it comes to words, meaning of words, and using words...". Similarly, "Meg", who taught at Grade 2, explained

...it is mostly word recognition, so we use pictures for them to remember words... we get them to learn definitions, context clues, and dictionary work...for them to acquire the knowledge of as many word meanings as they possibly can in different ways....

"Ty", who was at the Grade 3 level, stated:

... building dictionary skills, having the pupils understand and know how to use their dictionary ... having students understand the meaning of the word based on how it is used in a sentence, ...having them use words in a sentence. Whatever word or words were taught to them, sentence construction.

These instructional perspectives prompt the use of a set series of strategies that adhere to tasks that are essentially aligned with traditional instruction. For example, the use of the dictionary provides words and meaning for learners, exercises that include the use of

context clues, and the use of words in sentences. Teachers' instructional practice is largely guided by their awareness and understanding (Shube & Hailu, 2022). However, Sparapani et al. (2018) asserted that teachers need to shift from the trajectory of dictionary search and introduce strategies that support learner autonomy "across contexts."

Further, reading comprehension was not stated as the prime goal in vocabulary instruction. Instead, teachers measured students' success in vocabulary knowledge by improvement in writing when learners displayed the use of more complex words in their compositions and sentence writing. This is particularly true of the upper levels. For instance, "Katie" indicated that she linked vocabulary lessons to writing – "I would tell them also ...use examples in composition writing... knowing composition is a sore point for the children, so I would link it for them... to add more meaning to composition writing."

When asked about the regularity of their instruction, teachers' responses varied. At the upper level, vocabulary was timetabled twice a week, and at the lower levels – Grades 1-3 vocabulary is scheduled for only once a week, as well as integrated during the period assigned for literacy instruction. However, teachers reported that often they did not adhere to teaching vocabulary as timetabled, most times opting to instruct based on learners' needs. "Pritima" admitted to teaching vocabulary "once a week and yet again not every week". Likewise, "Deena", another first-grade teacher, explained that: "I don't want to say that I teach vocabulary every day, or every week. But the opportunity might come up either to look at a new word or to give a meaning of a word... whenever we get a chance...". Most of the teachers agreed that instruction in vocabulary was done in response to student needs and was not always done as per schedule. The common practice for vocabulary instruction is not only incidental but also relevant to the demand of the perceived needs of the students. These findings concur with those noted by McKeown (2019) about classroom vocabulary instruction, which indicated that teachers located vocabulary instruction based on student needs and not on the integral role this feature plays to advance students' overall vocabulary knowledge development.

One teacher, "Deena", attempted to explain the reason for the emphasis on the incidental approach. She described vocabulary instruction as "complex" and explained that

... with vocabulary, we have all these words to learn, and as teachers, we don't have enough time in the classroom to teach it... Teaching vocabulary is a lot of work when you come to think about it. I know that it should be taught a certain way, but... we don't have time to do all these things, so that is why I do it the way I do.

It is in this context that teachers' vocabulary instruction can be categorized as incidental. Another takeaway from the discussion was that teachers generally treated vocabulary instruction as a means of supporting learners' needs rather than consistently developing a bank of word knowledge. Vocabulary instruction, though not often apparent as a subject set aside for instruction, was applied across subject areas to match learners' needs and support the development of word knowledge. Again, teachers provided vocabulary instruction as demanded.

Challenges & Professional Development

In discussing the challenges, the interviewees shared challenges which included community and learners' language background, limited time, and the inability to meet learners' needs. Teachers talked about the challenges of teaching vocabulary to children who come from different backgrounds: "Katie" stated that she found it a challenge

... to teach vocabulary because they are all coming with different sets of words... as a teacher [you] have to set aside time to bring those students up to scratch. Then you cannot leave the ones that are [capable]. You have to leave work for them too, so it is a challenge for me...

Similar sentiments were expressed by all of the participants, with the core concern being how to manage and facilitate the varying learner needs, and the time in which these feats must be achieved. Teachers talked about applying "group work" to meet the varying levels. "Jane" spoke of a "3" group approach, which refers to flexible groupings. She, however, added "... but sometimes I do not meet the needs of brighter kids."

Moreover, the teachers noted that their challenges in teaching vocabulary resided in limited knowledge of how to creatively develop vocabulary knowledge. Teachers expressed their frustration in finding activities to bring freshness to the 'words and meaning' and dictionary routine. For example, "Deena" described the instructional routines in vocabulary as "boring".

In terms of professional development, teachers advocated greater attention to be given to the teaching of vocabulary, an observation confirmed by McKeown (2019). The participants reported that teacher development workshops generally do not focus on vocabulary, and when professional sessions are held, they are often too broad in scope or not specific to either teachers' or learners' needs. Professional development which takes into account the actual needs of teachers is critical in redirecting instructional practice in vocabulary.

One significant conclusion derived from the analysis of the comments made by teachers was that there was no significant difference in how vocabulary was treated by both trained graduate and undergraduate teachers.

Lesson Plans

An evaluation of lesson plans suggested that vocabulary was not given significant attention in planning. There was an absence of weekly planned vocabulary lessons. However, at the Grade 2 level, there was a creditable display of vocabulary-related activities that were foundational to reading comprehension. Among these were 'Read Alouds', use of flashcards, and word games, to name a few. The latter may be because of the guidance provided by the curriculum guide for the Grade 2 level. These were done during the period stipulated for literacy. At this level, there was evidence of time set aside for vocabulary instruction. The appearance of planned vocabulary lessons was less frequent in the upper primary levels, though not totally absent. References to vocabulary and related activities were negligible between grades 4 - 6.

Curriculum Guides

The curriculum guides form the basis from which resource units and schemes of work are developed for lesson preparation. An analysis of the guides disclosed that the trajectory for the acquisition and/or support of vocabulary was functional in nature. For example, at the Grade 3 level, the stated knowledge gains for learners made reference to constructing word knowledge to facilitate communication acts (Guyana Ministry of Education Curriculum guide – Literacy, Level 3, n.d.). There was no distinct mention of vocabulary knowledge as a basis for developing reading comprehension.

The basic structure was consistent across levels 3 – 6 of the guides. The content covered was relevant to areas in vocabulary, but did not provide guidance on how

instruction should be delivered. Similarly, strategies and activities were documented, but again, no recommendations were given. It was worth noting also that other sections of the guides do mention “word work”. These gave guidance on how teachers should proceed in the delivery of their lessons. However, recommendations on how to treat vocabulary instruction to accommodate reading comprehension appeared obscure. This means the onus was on teachers to make critical decisions about vocabulary instruction that facilitated reading comprehension – the extent of which relied heavily on teachers’ knowledge and competence.

Conclusion

Teachers’ treatment of vocabulary instruction followed traditional approaches that distance the role of vocabulary knowledge from reading comprehension. Greater emphasis is placed on word knowledge for improved writing skills. Instruction is done periodically and often on demand based on students’ needs. In this context, there is a need for teachers to be supported in acquiring a repertoire of distinct skills in vocabulary instruction. Also, there needs to be a movement to promote a culture that is devoted to the development of vocabulary knowledge as a basis for the improvement of reading comprehension.

Recommendations

- Professional development sessions with a primary focus on current developments in vocabulary instruction and how to integrate vocabulary instruction with reading comprehension will be useful. Also, sessions that encourage the implementation of student-centred strategies to develop vocabulary knowledge, within the context of reading comprehension, as well as strategies that support how learners could apply acquired vocabulary knowledge to reading comprehension, are highly recommended.
- Teachers’ preparation courses in language arts should be reviewed and redesigned to address critical components such as vocabulary in the development of reading comprehension skills.

References

- The handbook for the Association of Educational Communications and Technology (AECT). (2001, August 3). *Descriptive Research Methodologies*. <http://members.aect.org/edtech/ed1/41/41-01.html>
- Allington, R., & Shake, M. (1986). Remedial reading: Achieving curricular congruence in classroom and clinic. *The Reading Teacher*, 39(7), 648 - 654. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20199186>
- Bauman, J. F., & Heubach, K. M. (1996). Do basal readers deskill teachers? A national survey of educators' use and opinions of basals. *The Elementary School Journal*, 96(5), 511-526. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1001847>
- Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Omanson, R. C. (1987). The effects and uses of diverse vocabulary instructional techniques. In M. G. McKeown & M. E. Curtis (Eds.), *The nature of vocabulary acquisition*, 147-163. Erlbaum.
- Berne, J. I., & Blachowicz, C. (2008). What reading teachers say about vocabulary instruction: Voices from the classroom. *The Reading Teaching*, 62(4), 314-323. <https://doi.org/10.1598/RT.62.4.4>
- Biemiller, A. (2003). Vocabulary: Needed if more children are to read well. *Reading Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02702710390227297>
- Biemiller, A., & Boote, C. (2006). An effective method for building meaning vocabulary in primary grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(1), 44-62. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.98.1.44>
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27- 40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Bromley, K. (2004). Rethinking vocabulary instruction. *Language and Literacy Spectrum*, 14, 3-12.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research Methods in Education*, (8th ed). Taylor & Francis Group.
- Dagnaw, A. T. (2023). Revisiting the role of breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension. *Cogent Education*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2217345>
- Durkin, D. (1981). Reading comprehension instruction in five basal reader series. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 16(4), 515–544. <https://doi.org/10.2307/747314>

Investigating Vocabulary Approaches

- Durkin, D. (1984). Is there a match between what elementary teachers do and what basal reader manuals recommend? *The Reading Teacher*, 37(8), 734 -744. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20198586>
- Elbro, C., & Buch-Iversen, I., (2013). Activation of background knowledge for inference making: Effects on reading comprehension, *scientific studies of reading*, 17(6), 435 – 452. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888438.2013.774005>
- Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH, DHHS. (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read: Reports of the subgroups (00-4754). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Lapp, D. (2011). Coaching middle-level teachers to think aloud improves comprehension instruction and student reading achievement, *The Teacher Educator*, 46 (3), 231-243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08878730.2011.580043>
- Guyana Ministry of Education (n.d.) Curriculum guide: Literacy Grade 3.
- Hale, J. (2018). The 3 basic types of descriptive research methods. *Psych Central*. <https://psychcentral.com/blog/the-3-basic-types-of-descriptive-research-methods/>
- Harvey, S., & Goudvis, A. (2000). *Strategies that work*. Prembroke Publishers.
- Kalton, G. (2021). *Introduction to survey sampling*. (Vols. 1-0). Sage Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071909812>
- Lund, E., Werfel, K. L., & Schuele, C. M. (2014). Phonological awareness and vocabulary performance of monolingual and bilingual preschool children with hearing loss. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265659014531261>
- McGrath, C., Palmgren, P. J., & Liljedahl, M. (2019). Twelve tips for conducting qualitative research interviews. *Medical Teacher*, 41(9), 1002-1006. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2018.1497149>
- Marzano, R. J. (2020). *Teaching basic, advanced, and academic vocabulary: a comprehensive framework for elementary instruction*. (1st ed.). Gale eBooks.
- Moghadam, S. H., Zainal, Z., & Ghaderpour, M. (2012). A review on the important role of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension performance. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 66, 555-563. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.11.300>
- McKeown, M. G. (2019). Effective vocabulary instruction fosters knowing words, using

Investigating Vocabulary Approaches

- words, and understanding how words work. *Language, speech, and hearing services in schools*, 50(4), 466-476.
- Moody, S., Hu, X., Kuo, L.J. Jouhar, M., Xu, Z., & Lee, S. (2018). Vocabulary instruction: A critical analysis of theories, research, and practice. *Education Sciences*, 8(4). <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci8040180>
- Nagy, W. E. (1988). Vocabulary to improve reading comprehension. *International Reading Association*, 1-52. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED298471.pdf>
- Nagy, W. E. (2005). Why instruction needs to be long-term and comprehensive. In E. H. Hiebert & M. L. Kamil (Eds.), *Teaching and learning vocabulary: Bringing research to practice*, 27- 44. Routledge.
- Rahman, S. (2016). The advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in language “Testing and Assessment” research: A literature review. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 6(1). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1120221.pdf>
- Richek, M. (2005). Words are wonderful: Interactive, time-efficient strategies to teach meaning vocabulary. *International Reading Association*, 58(5), 414- 423. <https://doi.org/10.1598/RT,Ba.5.1>
- Shube, B. D., & Hailu, A. (2022). Investigating EFL teachers’ knowledge and practice in vocabulary instruction. *LET: Linguistics, Literature and English teaching Journal*, 12(2), 259–285. <https://doi.org/10.18592/let.v12i2.7095>
- Stahl, S. A., & Fairbanks, M. M. (1986). The effects of vocabulary Instruction: A model-based meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 56(1), 72 – 110. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1170287>
- Sparapani, N., Carlisle, J. F., Mc Donald, C. C., Mc Clean, l., Wood, T., Toste, J., & Day, S. (2018). Direct and reciprocal effects among social skills, vocabulary, and reading comprehension in First Grade. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 53. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2018.03.003>
- Watts, S. M. (1995). Vocabulary instruction during reading lessons in six classrooms. *Journal of Reading Behaviour*, 27(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/10862969509547889>
- Winwood, J. (2019). Using interviews. In Lambert M. (Ed.), *Practical research methods in education: An early researcher's critical guide* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351188395>

- Wright, T. S., & Cervetti, G. N. (2016). A systematic review of the research on vocabulary instruction that impacts text comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly, 52*(2), 203 - 226. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.163>
- Yıldırım, K., Yıldız, M., & Ates, S. (2011). Is vocabulary a strong variable predicting reading comprehension and does the prediction degree of vocabulary vary according to text types. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice, 11* (3), 1541-1547. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ936333.pdf>

Elsa Cromarty Hosein holds a master's degree in educational technology and English Language Teaching and a Master of Science in Literacy and Learning. While she mainly teaches courses in literacy education, her research interests cover not only teacher innovation and practice, but also the writings of Afro-American and Caribbean authors.

Administrative Leadership during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Organizational Accomplishments: Perspectives of Teachers at a Secondary School in Guyana

Lydia Narain

Abstract

This research investigates the impact of administrative leadership on the accomplishment of organizational goals in a crisis situation. It utilized an adopted descriptive survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to obtain responses on administrative leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic from 35 teachers at a secondary school in Guyana. Results showed that 32 (91%) of the teachers agreed that administrative leadership influences the accomplishment of organizational goals as reflected during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Some of the recommendations and enabling factors for organizational accomplishments suggested by teachers include the utilization of a transformational leadership style, an increase in training opportunities, open communication, equitable access to school resources, staff motivation, and quality assurance. The findings of this research can inform the leadership practices of education administrators in Guyana when applied to real-world crisis situations or in the routine practices of education administrators.

Keywords: accomplishment, administration, crisis, leadership, organization

Introduction and Background

The COVID-19 Pandemic has created fundamental changes throughout the world; the education fraternity has been affected to a great extent (Ochavillo, 2020). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020) revealed that funds that were allocated for education were drastically reduced and diverted to the health sector to tackle the rising cases of patients who contracted the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This transfer of funds has resulted in hindrances to the continuity of learning and the provision of educational resources (Lemoine & Richardson, 2020). Such evidence was substantiated by the World Bank (2020), which reported that countries have been amending their budgets to divert finances to the health sector. According to Cepal (2020) in The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Caribbean Region has been affected

greatly by the pandemic, with the drastic paradigm shift to online learning and other means of communication. Many educators were not prepared for such a transformation (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020). Education administrators were required to implement leadership styles that facilitated the accomplishment of organizational goals.

The effectiveness of educational institutions can only be realised when persons who hold leadership positions are able to function in any situation. The global crisis situation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic tested the leadership skills of many school administrators. This research focused on the crisis situation brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and the effect of administrative leadership on the accomplishment of organizational goals. An examination of leadership as a concept, which has been extensively studied in many contexts, has varying emergent definitions depending on the role of leaders in society (Guterman, 2023). For the purposes of this study, leadership is defined as a process by which a group of people is led to achieve organizational goals (Blakely, 2022; Kaplan & Owings, 2017; Muczyk & Holt, 2008). Leadership becomes effective when leaders are able to apply all the principles and theoretical underpinnings into practice. According to Benmira and Agboola (2021, p. 3), “effective leadership is recognized as key to the success of any organization.”

Additionally, an extension of “Leadership,” in the context of this study, brings into perspective the concept of “Crisis Leadership” defined by Bundy et al. (2017, as cited in Hashi & Hock 2022), as “a process in which leaders act to prepare for unexpected crises, particularly in dealing with the salient nature of the crises and its disruptive events and circumstances” (p. 108), as was experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic, which was a global outbreak of the coronavirus of 2019 (SARS-CoV-2), resulted in a public health emergency where physical human interactions were restricted (World Health Organization, 2024). This restriction saw the partial and full closure of schools and other organizations globally, regionally, and locally (Esposito & Principi, 2020; Nanda & Ryan, 2023). This global crisis saw many educators grappling to implement non-conventional pedagogical practices. The continuation of the teaching and learning process was hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Educators found themselves

in the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, coupled with poor administrative leadership, which exacerbated the crisis situation.

Guyana's Education System during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Many school administrators were not fully trained to function in a crisis situation or to utilize crisis leadership styles during the COVID-19 pandemic. This led to educators devising strategies to ensure a continuous implementation of the pedagogical process with the hope that these strategies would work. A high percentage of students were taught in the online modality, while a few students were allowed to be on school premises, adhering to the social distancing recommendations. According to the Minister of Education, Guyana (2021), the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) and the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) students were expected to be present physically in the classroom. Many educators were teaching in the online modality in some schools. Senior teachers, as well as teachers who were preparing students to write standardized examinations, were present in the physical classrooms. The Ministry of Education, Guyana, in conjunction with the Organisation of American States and Pro Futuro Foundation, spearheaded training sessions in Information and Communication Technology, as well as other supportive mechanisms (CARICOM ICT Route, 2020).

Additionally, the Ministry of Education, Guyana, through its website, provided several outreach programmes, both online and offline, for students and teachers. The school as an organization could not cease to function, so whether students were taught virtually or in-person, the duties and responsibilities of all teachers had to be executed. All school records had to be completed and submitted in a timely manner. The calendar of activities of the school had to be executed. Teachers were left to implement strategies to ensure that the students under their charge were receiving resources that were in keeping with the subject areas and in conjunction with the curriculum guides, as stipulated by the Ministry of Education, as the policy-making body. While the Ministry of Education was striving to put systems in place to ensure that learning was taking place, there were issues with administrators who were not proactive in ensuring that plans were implemented.

The “Target School” during the COVID-19 Pandemic

At the target school, teachers, parents, and students collectively needed guidance as they did not have any plans on the way forward, as the administrators were not forthcoming with the necessary information. There was poor communication between the administrators and teachers, parents, and students, which may have affected the accomplishment of organizational objectives. In this context, it is expected that administrators should have effective communication with staff members to decide on how to handle unexpected situations that may arise. Teachers were not prepared to teach virtually, while students and parents were also not prepared for online teaching and learning.

Staff motivation and administrative leadership are critical contributing factors to schools being able to achieve their organizational goals (Noor et al., 2020; Alqahtani & Rajkhan, 2020; Ozensoy, 2021; He & Xiao, 2020; Durak & Cankaya, 2020; Coker, 2020; Francisco, 2019; Jameel & Ahmad, 2020; Aguayo-Chan et al., 2020). The professional competence of those placed in administrative and other supervisory roles must be examined so as to ensure that school goals can be achieved (Berlian, 2022). The accomplishment of organizational goals at the target school was hindered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the many challenges faced by teachers at the school, this study sought to highlight the factors that contributed to the school being inefficient in organizational accomplishments and to offer recommendations for the efficient accomplishment of organizational goals through enabling practices. The examination of the factors contributing to the school being unable to achieve its objectives and the recommendation of enabling factors for the achievement of organizational goals is critical. If not examined, there can be dire consequences in the overall performance of the school on the part of the students and teachers, and this can lead to a breakdown in the school’s standards. This study aims to examine the impact of administrative leadership on the accomplishment of organizational goals in a crisis situation. More precisely, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers perceive administrative leadership style and its influence on the accomplishment of organizational goals in the COVID-19 pandemic crisis situation?

2. What are the factors that contribute to the accomplishment of organizational goals in the COVID-19 pandemic crisis situation?

This study on administrative leadership in a crisis situation will provide a guide for the Ministry of Education's policy-making body to utilize in crisis leadership training for education administrators, so as to enable effective leadership and management practices. The findings will contribute to the education administration process within the context of the secondary school system in Guyana.

Review of Literature

The aim of the literature is to highlight the importance of major variables in the accomplishment of organizational goals. The leadership style implemented by education administrators in a crisis situation is very critical in the achievement of organizational goals and objectives. Effective communication, motivation, monitoring, and supervision as enabling factors to organizational accomplishments are also very significant in the attainment of set goals (Bunteng, 2022; Reidhead, 2021).

An Examination of Leadership in Crisis Situations

Leadership by all standards involves the utilization of leadership skills in the execution of duties and responsibilities by educational administrators and other leaders. The application of leadership principles and practices should be appropriate for the activity that has to be executed or in the context in which the leadership style has to be implemented (Adams et al., 2023; Ariffin & Yusoff, 2023). Crisis leadership, according to Hu et al. (2022), represents the “strategic and operational responses of organisational leaders when confronted with crises, disasters, or disruptive events” (cited in Kurniawan et al., 2024, p. 133). During the COVID-19 pandemic, which is one of the more recent crisis situations, the leadership capabilities of educational administrators were displayed, and the efficiency with which organizations were able to achieve their goals was observed. In Kurniawan et al.’s (2024) study, it was found that crisis leadership had a significant influence on the innovation capabilities of leaders. Innovation capabilities had a significant influence on sustainable performance. There was a strong, statistically significant influence with a p-value of <0.01. The results indicated that crisis leadership greatly impacted innovation capabilities, which led to sustainable performance.

To add, during a crisis situation, the innate qualities of a leader are brought to light or put into practice. The resultant effects of leadership in a crisis situation may be positive or negative. The positive emotions exhibited by organizational leaders foster a positive drive towards the accomplishment of organizational goals (Ndone, 2024). According to Martin (2020), as mentioned by Hashi and Hock (2022) in their study on crisis leadership, “a crisis tends to bring out either the most excellent quality or the worst attribute in an individual, thus highlighting if he or she is a capable leader or not” (p. 104). The capability of a leader to make adjustments and critical decisions in a crisis situation will determine whether the organization is able to achieve its short-term and, eventually, its long-term objectives. In many instances, a crisis situation may last for prolonged periods, thus it is incumbent on education administrators to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to lead in a crisis situation. Leaders must be able to utilize several leadership styles depending on the situation and should not adhere to one leadership style in all situations. The strict adherence of administrative leaders to predominantly use one leadership style may hinder the accomplishment of organizational goals (Caday, 2023; Kim, 2022). Hence, the application of other leadership styles, such as transformational leadership, should be considered. Leaders may be fixed in their ways and may tend to utilize a predominant leadership style, which may not work in all situations. The transformational leadership style is meritorious, as highlighted below.

Merits of Transformational Leadership Style in Addressing Human Resource Needs

Leadership in a crisis situation, as in the COVID-19 pandemic, where the health of human beings is at risk, requires leaders to make adaptations to cater to the needs of the human resources. If the health of the human resources is at risk, then the leadership style that is utilized by the administrative leader must be one that addresses the needs of the human resources. In addressing the needs of human resources, the transformational leadership style may come into effect. The advantages of the transformational leadership style cannot be overemphasized; there are more merits to the transformational leadership style than are there demerits (Basalamah, 2023). The transformational leader takes the views of subordinates into perspective before making decisions. The humanistic nature of the transformational leader will be exhibited where the four dimensions of “Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized

Consideration” are incorporated in the leadership style of the administrators (Khan et al., 2022, p. 2). The four dimensions of transformational leadership, when utilized within the educational organization in a crisis situation, may lead to sustained performance of the staff, regardless of the crisis or when there is strategic utilization of the dimensions. Employees are propelled to work within the context of the organization in the crisis situation because they feel motivated to do so (Ul Hosna et al., 2021). There is greater collaborative innovation within organizations when the transformational leadership style is implemented (Jabbar, 2022).

The following studies highlight the effectiveness of the Transformational Leadership Style on employee performance/job satisfaction, which will add validity to the need for the implementation of the transformational leadership style in a crisis situation, as in the context of this study. In a study conducted by Basalamah (2023), on the “effect of transformational leadership style and job satisfaction on employee performance,” where 68 employees participated, it was found that transformational leadership style and job satisfaction had a positive, statistically significant effect on employee performance, with a correlation value of $R = 0.864$. Additionally, a study conducted by Karim (2024) on “Transformational Leadership Style, Transactional Leadership Style, and Job Satisfaction” showed similar results to Basalamah’s 2023 study. The results of the study showed that both leadership styles had positive, statistically significant effects on employees, with a p -value = 0.000. A quantitative study conducted by Duyan and Yildiz (2020) to investigate the effect of transformational leadership and job satisfaction on 208 academic staff of six universities in Turkey was very noteworthy. Results of the study discovered that the staff from the six different universities were satisfied with the transformational leadership style, which had a positive effect on job satisfaction. Moreover, Francisco’s (2019) quantitative study on “School Principals’ Transformational Leadership Styles and their Effects on Teachers’ Self-Efficacy” proved that effectiveness and contingent reward of the principals had significant effects on the 260 secondary teachers in Plaridel District. The effectiveness of transformational leadership enabled subordinates to be transformed through motivation, providing individualized consideration and catering to staff needs. When the needs of the staff are met, the staff will be motivated to work for the greater good of the organisation holistically. The results of these studies have further substantiated the aforementioned

merits of the transformational leadership style. The transformational leadership style is one leadership style that administrators should consider when facing any crisis situation.

Effective Communication as a Tool for Achieving Organizational Goals

Effective communication, whether in a crisis situation or not, is one of the major tools that will ensure organizational expectations and plans are conveyed to the employees. Uwandu et al. (2022) postulated that “effective communication is the exchange of thoughts and information. It is an interaction process between individuals who share information and ideas necessary to conduct successful job performance and achieve organizational goals” (p. 7). The employees would become aware of the requirements and would work towards achieving organizational goals. When effective communication is executed in an organization, the accompanying resources needed to implement the execution of the plan are also garnered well ahead of time. Effective communication can take many forms, such as verbal and non-verbal communication. In a study conducted by Reidhead (2021) on the role of communication in the achievement of organizational goals and objectives, it was found that “hard-working and dedicated employees, teamwork, proper decision making can only come into effect when effective communication is implemented” (p. 271). Educational administrators must convey plans for the organisation, correspondence received from the central and regional bodies, and any other information that is necessary to all staff. In this way, the staff would be aware of the plans and would have to implement the required actions since the information was communicated to them. Effective communication is very critical in the execution of activities and accomplishment of organizational goals (Zerfass & Volk, 2020).

Hamkar et al.’s (2024) study on the “impact of effective communication on organizational performance, focusing on efficiency and profitability” (p. 242), found that “effective communication contributes to organizational development by enhancing employee productivity through verbal communication, improving performance efficiency through visual communication, and facilitating quick and accurate daily activities” (p. 242). Effective communication in any organization would have a positive influence on organizational accomplishments. As was observed in Razak et al.’s (2019) study, where effective communication was explored as a tool for the accomplishment of organizational goals, the results revealed that the highest influence for achieving organizational goals was

supervisor communication. Hence, effective communication should be implemented whether in a crisis situation or not, and all communication channels must be established in a network that adheres to a chain of command in any situation (Broadfoot & Guth, 2019). Effective communication within the institution under study may prove to be one of the enabling factors for organizational accomplishments.

Methodology

Design

This research utilized a mixed-method explanatory sequential design. In this design, the researcher utilized a qualitative study to add clarity or to comprehend the results of the predominantly quantitative research, so as to obtain a holistic reflection of the view of participants (Toyon, 2021). The quantitative and qualitative data were analysed separately. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were computed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences for the quantitative part of the research, and to establish the reliability of the instrument used. Qualitative descriptive coding to find themes and patterns using the Delve Tool was utilized for the qualitative part of the research. The conclusion was drawn based on the information that emanated from both the quantitative and qualitative data that were collected. This enhanced the credibility of the study. The questionnaire was administered via online survey, since this was more efficient in reaching the entire staff during the COVID-19 pandemic, while semi-structured interviews were conducted to address the issue at hand and to provide some flexibility, but not to divert to other issues that the research is not focused on, as well as to have data that can be used to address specific current issues. The semi-structured interviews were conducted both via face-to-face and online, since three heads of departments were not present in school at the time the interview was conducted; hence, these interviews were conducted online.

Instrument

In the quantitative aspect of this research, a questionnaire was adopted to gain information from all teachers on the impact of administrative leadership in a crisis situation and organizational accomplishments. The questionnaire was divided into five sections with a total of 25 closed-ended questions. The first 20 questions were in a Likert Scale format

with five degrees of responses: strongly disagree-1, disagree-2, neutral-3, agree-4, and strongly agree-5. The last 5 questions were dichotomous questions. The qualitative aspect of this research took the form of a semi-structured interview with the heads of departments. Twenty open-ended questions were asked during the interview process that covered the headings of Leadership, Enablement, Alignment, and Development. The instruments were adopted from Lall-Trail (2021) and were modified to create open-ended questions for the interview and closed-ended questions for the survey. Many of the interview questions required merely a simple one-word response since there were follow-up questions.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

The validity of the questionnaire was established through pilot testing. A total of ten questionnaires were distributed to teachers who were not part of the sample, prior to the commencement of the study. Face validity and content validity were established by two experts in the field of educational research. A test of reliability for internal consistency was measured by computing Cronbach's Alpha on the first 20 Likert scale items on the instrument. A Cronbach's Alpha of $\alpha = 0.796$ was obtained. The reliability statistics result of 0.796 indicated a high acceptable internal consistency and showed that the questionnaire was reliable. A Cronbach's Alpha based on the dichotomous items revealed a Cronbach's Alpha of $\alpha = 0.817$. Both values were indicative of acceptable internal consistencies.

Population

The population of teachers at the school that this study targeted comprised seven male teachers and 31 female teachers, including seven heads of departments. A total of 38 teachers made up the population, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Population

Teachers	Male	Female	Total
	7	31	38

The quantitative aspect of this study utilized a total population sampling method to gain insights from all the staff members and to reduce bias. A purposive sampling methodology was utilized for the qualitative aspect of this research, as it would not have

been feasible to interview all members of staff. The heads of departments were purposively selected as they have teachers directly under their charge and would have been in a position to speak on what was happening in the respective departments. The total population sampling and purposive sampling were selected for validity and generalizability, and are interrelated and specific to the research site (Thomas, 2022). A total of 38 and seven teachers formed the sample for the quantitative and qualitative parts of the research, respectively, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Sample

Research Methods	Male	Female	Total
Quantitative (All Teachers)	7	31	38
Qualitative (HODs)	3	4	7

Response Rate

All 38 teachers were given access to the online questionnaire for completion. After two weeks, there were 35 responses. Six interviews were conducted out of the total of seven, since the researcher was unable to make contact with one head of department. Thus, there was a slight variation in the number of participants as was initially expected. There were three fewer respondents in the quantitative section and one fewer respondent in the qualitative section. The data were analysed accordingly. Therefore, 35 teachers participated in the quantitative section, and six heads of departments participated in the qualitative section. The response rate is depicted in Table 3.

Table 3

Response Rate Sample

Research Methods	Male	Female	Total
Quantitative (All Teachers)	6	29	35
Qualitative (HODs)	3	3	6

Ethical Considerations

The ethical principles of confidentiality, informed consent, and participants' withdrawal from the study were adhered to as part of the social responsibility of the researcher. A letter of permission was granted by the Ministry of Education, Guyana, for the researcher to conduct the research at the research site. The Regional Education Department, Region 5, and the deputy principal of the research site were given copies of the letter of permission to conduct the study. The researcher embarked on the research where teachers were informed of the purpose of the research, and their rights to decline involvement in the research. The biographical data of teachers were not required for the research. The respondents were reminded about the privacy and confidentiality of their responses. All teachers who participated in the study gave consent. Participants' identities were withheld in the principle of De-identification. Data suppression was implemented to prevent the name of the educational institute from being mentioned within the responses of the participants, as well as personal descriptive details of the administrator. The general findings of the research were made available to the respondents.

Quantitative Findings

The quantitative data that were obtained from the descriptive survey questionnaire were analysed, and descriptive statistics were produced to answer the first research question. The question formats were Likert scaled, where the values were as follows: Strongly Disagree - 1; Disagree - 2; Neutral - 3; Agree - 4; Strongly Agree - 5, and dichotomous questions which required yes or no responses. Given paper length constraints, the quantitative analysis presented here is selective and focused on supporting evidence to answer the first research question. A detailed analysis of all gathered data is reserved for a future publication.

The first research question asked: *How do teachers perceive the administrative leadership style and its influence on the accomplishment of organizational goals in a crisis situation?* Thirty-five teachers responded to the statement, *Leadership style of the administrator affects the completion of records*, as follows: 23 (65.7%) teachers strongly agreed, and 7 (20%) teachers agreed that the Leadership style of the administrator affects

the completion of records. Three (8.6%) teachers chose to remain neutral, and two (5.7%) strongly disagreed with the statement.

Figure 1 highlights the responses of teachers when they were asked whether the administrative leadership style implemented by the school’s administrator affects the completion of records.

Figure 1

Administrative Leadership Style Affects the Completion of Records



Figure 1 shows the responses of 35 teachers and how they perceived leadership style as having an effect on the completion of records. It can be seen that 85.7% of these teachers believe that the leadership style of the administrator affects the completion of records.

To substantiate the perception of 85.7% of the teachers’ view that administrator leadership style affects the completion of records, teachers were asked to respond to the statement in the dichotomous format: *The Leadership Style Utilized by the Administrator Greatly Influences the Non-Achievement of School Goals*. It can be seen that 32 (91%) of the teachers responded “yes” to the statement, while 3 (9%) of the teachers responded “No” to the statement. This statement is generalized and includes all school goals.

Figure 2

Administrative Leadership Style Greatly Influences the Non-achievement of School Goals

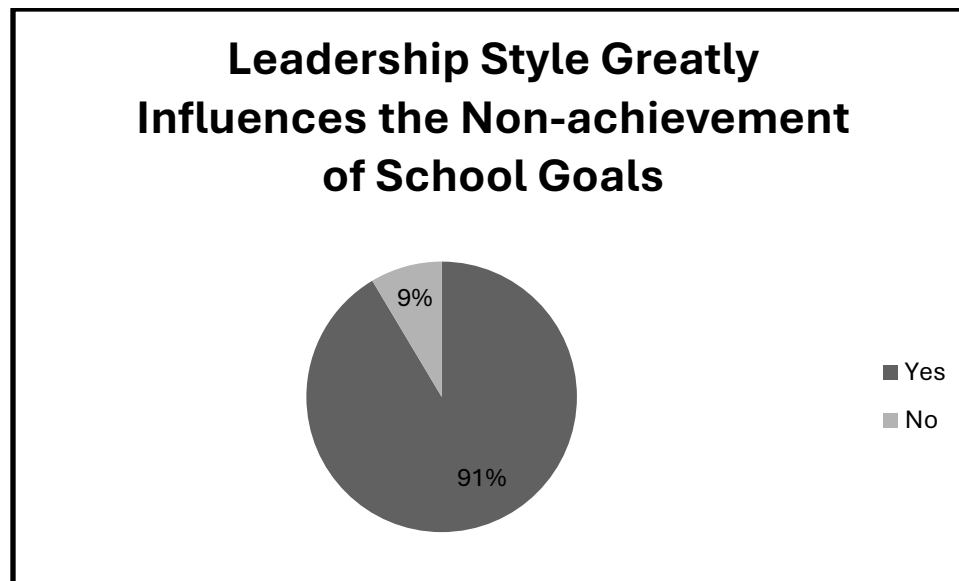


Figure 2 shows that 91% of the teachers are in agreement that leadership style greatly influences the non-achievement of school goals. While completion of records is affected, it can be seen that 32 teachers are in total agreement that administrative leadership style has an effect on the non-achievement of school goals, generally in response to the dichotomous question.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data that were obtained from the semi-structured interviews with the heads of departments were analysed with the use of the Delve Software, where responses were grouped and coded, and themes were developed to answer the second research question. Specific questions were focused on so as to provide supporting evidence to answer the second research question qualitatively.

The second research question asked: *What are the factors that contribute to the accomplishment of organizational goals in the COVID-19 pandemic crisis situation?* In this respect, both hindering and enabling factors to organizational accomplishments were highlighted. This was done so as to provide rich data that will serve to effectively focus on

the hindering factors to organizational goals, with the aim of enabling educators to be aware of these factors. The enabling factors are derived from the hindering factors to organizational accomplishments. The six heads of departments responded to the interview question: *What are the factors that hindered organizational accomplishments in your view?*

The following are responses from heads of departments.

Larry: *Most times HM does not inform me about what is happening in the school. Sometimes I need stuff for my department but when I ask, I am not given a clear answer. Some teachers are not trained to deliver the curriculum online, and when I make suggestions for training, I do not get support, and the nonsense continues.*

Maude: *The HM leadership, she speaks to me like a ... When she sees me, her facial expression and ... is a turn off.³ My department is the least important to her. It is like she doesn't want to hear a word I have to say. I am waiting on forms from her. I keep reminding her, but nothing happens. So I can't get things done. This is definitely a hindrance.*

Ken: *I believe that during this time, there should be more communication but it seems like there is no communication. I think more meetings are definitely needed. We need to know, what are the plans like how to keep track of teachers as they teach and so on.*

Anan: *I only have an issue when it comes to how things are managed. I think more should be done.*

Tray: *Oh my, so many, but I will say the dictatorship should stop, and teachers will be more comfortable to do what is required.*

Dorothy: *Our school would perform better if teachers were given more attention and encouragement to do their jobs. There should be more supervision of junior teachers. They need guidance. The entire staff must collaborate. I was proud to work at... but recently no, because of poor administration from the HM.*

³ Data suppression was activated and noted by ... to remove words that would serve to body shame the administrator or reveal sensitive information.

Table 4
Themes Emanating from Responses

Question	Analyses of Responses	Themes
1. What are the factors that hindered organizational accomplishments in your view?	6- Total Responses	1. Leadership Style 2. Poor Communication 3. Poor Feedback 4. Lack of Motivation 5. Limited Observation 6. Lack of Monitoring 7. Poor Support 8. Resources Denial

Table 4 shows that six heads of departments responded to the question. Included in the responses was the view that the administrator utilized an Autocratic Leadership Style predominantly, which may affect teachers’ approach towards organizational accomplishments. The heads of departments indicated that communication with teachers is not effective and defeats the accomplishment of school goals. They stated that they do not feel motivated to go beyond what is necessary. They believed that feedback, support, encouragement, guidance, and collaboration are lacking. The heads of departments also stated that information, resources, and training opportunities were not made available to all teachers.

Additionally, the heads of departments were asked: *What do you perceive as the enabling factors to organizational accomplishments?*

The following are responses from heads of departments.

Larry: *There should be feedback not only from HM but across the school. I think in this way we will be able to do what is expected within the timeframe. Also, provide teachers with the necessary training to deliver the curriculum in line with the standard requirements.*

Maude: *Everyone should be treated as an individual. We should be more of a family than colleagues. Our concerns should be considered. I think a transformational leadership style would be better for HM to use.*

Ken: *Good communication, resources available and confidentiality also motivation, and teamwork.*

Anan: *In my view, because of poor management, HM should communicate regularly with teachers the school goals. Providing support and guidance to teachers too to ensure that they are doing the right things.*

Tray: *Transformational leadership should be adopted during this time since it will help teachers to develop the skills needed. This helps to motivate teachers to better themselves and work towards achieving the departmental goals.*

Dorothy: *Through meetings and circulars, we are to be informed for the sake of our safety and effectiveness of teaching. If there are any changes in plans, we must be aware. Because you know changes have to be made in this situation.*

Table 5

Enabling Factors to Organizational Accomplishments

Question	Analyses of Responses	Themes
2. What do you perceive as the enabling factors to organizational accomplishments?	6- Total Responses	1. Transformational Leadership Style 2. Open Communication 3. Timely Feedback 4. Training 5. Staff Motivation 6. Quality Assurance 7. Resource Availability

Table 5 shows that six heads of departments responded to the question. They believed that a Transformational Leadership Style should be incorporated in daily administration and be used to a greater extent, especially in a crisis situation. There should be open

communication, timely feedback, training opportunities, staff motivation, quality assurance, and resource availability, according to the heads of departments who were interviewed.

Discussion

The data showed that 30 out of 35 teachers believed that the leadership style of the administrator affects the completion of records. The results also showed that only two teachers disagreed with the statement; some teachers remained neutral on the question. The leadership style of the administrator affects organizational accomplishments, according to the findings; the organizational accomplishments may be affected negatively or positively, as postulated by researchers (Caday, 2023; Fitri et al., 2024; Steyn, 2020; Jameel & Ahmad, 2020). In this context, the leadership style of the administrator affected the accomplishment of organizational goals negatively. It can be seen that a greater percentage of teachers believe that the leadership style utilized by the administrator greatly influences the non-achievement of school goals. While the completion of school records is specifically affected by administrator leadership style in this context, the effect is negative when it comes to leadership style and the overall non-achievement of school goals (in keeping with Buhagiar & Anand, 2021; Fors-Brandebo, 2020; Hanafi et al., 2023).

Further, school goals may not be achieved as a result of the administrator's leadership style, according to the greater percentage of teachers who participated in the quantitative phase of this study. It was suggested by participants that the administrator should incorporate the transformational leadership style to a greater extent in a crisis situation, as well as other leadership styles as the need arises. Participants felt that the transformational leadership style would be more effective than the dominant autocratic leadership style utilized by the administrator. Transformational leadership style can be very effective in the accomplishment of organizational goals (Hidayat et al., 2023; Jabbar, 2022; Karim, 2024). The merits of a transformational leadership style are numerous, and while there are new leadership styles, emphasis is placed on the development of transformational leadership in the 21st century (Deng et al., 2022).

Additionally, teachers were adamant that there should be effective, open communication to disseminate information, do follow-ups, check-ins, and monitor,

evaluate, and assess the progress on the completion of records and other school requirements/goals. This is very critical as essential information will be disseminated in a timely manner to solicit timely interventions (Hamkar et al., 2024; Rehan et al., 2024). Teachers believed that the administrator should support teachers and make available resources for the sustenance and execution of activities. The heads of departments also asserted that training and development opportunities should be available to cater to the needs of the teachers and students, particularly for the online mode of classroom instruction and interaction. As part of quality assurance, the heads of departments believed that activities/records should be evaluated in order to make necessary adjustments before submission to the regional education department.

Conclusion

To summarize, it is evident from the findings that teachers are of the view that administrative leadership influences the organizational activities in many ways, such as in the achievement of organizational goals and objectives. The teachers agreed that the administrator's leadership style affects the completion of organizational records, as was reflected in the quantitative data that was collected via the questionnaire. The analysis of the interviews indicated that the heads of departments' views are reflective of the situations they were experiencing as supervisors, leaders, and middle managers in the organization, and as teachers within the organization as a whole. The views of the heads of departments were very critical in going beyond just agreeing and disagreeing with statements. The views that were expressed by the heads of departments added in-depth explanations that highlighted their expectations. A critical analysis of the responses by the heads of departments highlighted that the enabling factors to organizational accomplishments were: the utilization or incorporation of the transformational leadership style to address human resource needs which will impact the drive towards organizational accomplishments, the need for open communication, timely feedback, development of contingency plan, staff motivation, quality assurance and making resources available to all members of staff.

Recommendations

1. The Ministry of Education, Guyana, should provide training opportunities for all school administrators on crisis leadership. These administrators should be equipped with all the necessary skills to execute administrative duties, so as to ensure that organizational goals can be accomplished in crisis situations (Mau et al., 2022).
2. Resources that are available to assist teachers in the delivery of the curriculum, both virtually and face-to-face, should be made available to all teachers through ethical leadership and proper decision-making. Educational and other resources are needed to execute the schedule of activities and for the ultimate accomplishment of organizational goals (Taheri, 2022).
3. There should be open communication in the functioning of the school as an open system organization. Communication can be executed in many forms, given the wealth of technological advancements available today, such as the use of social media platforms, video conferencing, cloud computing, email and telephone, and internet service that are available in most educational institutions. These technological advancements should be made available to all schools as they are very critical in crisis situations (Rydzak, 2022).

References

- Adams, D., Hussain, S., & Tan, K. L. (2023). Inclusive leadership for schools: Practices, challenges, and future directions. *Educational Leadership*, 85–99. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-8494-7_6
- Aguayo-Chan, J. C., Espejel López, M. V., Pinto Loria, M. de, & Briceño, E. D. (2020). The hard teacher's leadership coping to the COVID-19 pandemic. *World Journal of Education*, 10(6), 55. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wje.v10n6p55>
- Alqahtani, A. Y., & Rajkhan, A. A. (2020). E-learning critical success factors during the COVID-19 pandemic: A comprehensive analysis of e-learning managerial perspectives. *Education Sciences*, 10(9), 216. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10090216>
- Ariffin, T. F., & Yusoff, S. M. (2023). Contextual leadership: Characteristics and practices. *Educational Leadership*, 101–117. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-8494-7_7

Administrative Leadership during the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Basalamah, M. S. (2023). The effect of transformational leadership style and job satisfaction on employee performance. *Advances in Human Resource Management Research*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.60079/ahrmr.v1i2.77>
- Benmira, S., & Agboola, M. (2021). Evolution of leadership theory. *BMJ Leader*, 5(1), 3–5. <https://doi.org/10.1136/leader-2020-000296>
- Berlian, Z. (2022). Analysis of the need for increasing professional competence of elementary school teachers. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 14(3), 4177–4186. <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v14i3.2619>
- Blakely, C. (2022). Case study: Leadership strategies to achieve organizational excellence. *Academia Letters*. <https://doi.org/10.20935/al4565>
- Broadfoot, K. J., & Guth, T. A. (2019). Keys to effective communication in all circumstances. *Communication in Emergency Medicine*, 27–42. <https://doi.org/10.1093/med/9780190852917.003.0003>
- Buhagiar, K., & Anand, A. (2021). Synergistic triad of crisis management: Leadership, knowledge management and organizational learning. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 31(2), 412–429. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijoa-03-2021-2672>
- Bundy, J., Pfarrer, M. D., Short, C. E., & Coombs, W. T. (2017). Crises and crisis management: Integration, interpretation, and research development. *Journal of Management*, 43(6), 1661–1692. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316680030>
- Bunteng, L. (2022). Factors affecting organizational performance: A study on four factors: Motivation, ability, roles, and organizational support. *Journal Of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.56943/jssh.v1i4.147>
- Caday, Ma. A. (2023). Management leadership style: A catalyst to organizational strength. *The American Journal of Management and Economics Innovations*, 05(10), 90–103. <https://doi.org/10.37547/tajmei/volume05issue10-08>
- CARICOM ICT Route. (2020). Professional Level - ICTs at the service of education <https://education.gov.gy/web2/index.php/profuturo-manuals/3419-2020-caricom-ict-route-professional-level-icts-at-the-service-of-education/file>
- Cepal, N. (2020). *Publications: CEPAL*. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications>
- Coker, D. C. (2020). Education, policy, and juvenile delinquents: A mixed methods investigation during COVID-19. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 10(1), 22. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v10n1p22>
- Deng, C., Gulseren, D., Isola, C., Grocutt, K., & Turner, N. (2022). Transformational leadership effectiveness: An evidence-based primer. *Human Resource*

Administrative Leadership during the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Development International*, 26(5), 627–641.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2022.2135938>
- Durak, G., & Cankaya, S. (2020). Undergraduate students' views about emergency distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic. *European Journal of Open Education and E-Learning Studies*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejoe.v5i1.3441>
- Duyan, M., & Yildiz, S.M. (2020). The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Job Satisfaction: An Investigation on Academic Staffs at Faculties of Sports Sciences in Turkey. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3746710>
- Esposito, S., & Principi, N. (2020). School closure during the coronavirus disease 2019 (covid-19) pandemic. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 174(10), 921.
<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.1892>
- Francisco, C. (2019). School principals transformational leadership styles and their effects on teachers self-efficacy. *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 7(10), 622–635. <https://doi.org/10.21474/ijar01/9875>
- Fitri, F. A., Syukur, M., & Faradiba, D. (2024). The effects of Management Control Systems and leadership style on company performance. *Australasian Business, Accounting and Finance Journal*, 18(2), 175–187.
<https://doi.org/10.14453/aabfj.v18i2.11>
- Fors- Brandebo, M. (2020). Destructive leadership in crisis management. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 41(4), 567–580.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/lodj-02-2019-0089>
- Gutterman, A. (2023). Definitions and conceptions of leadership. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4465181>
- Hamkar, N. A., Bashar, H., & Hikmat, H. (2024). Effective communication as a tool for achieving organizational goal and objective. *Journal for Research in Applied Sciences and Biotechnology*, 3(3), 242–248. <https://doi.org/10.55544/jrasb.3.3.37>
- Hanafi, I., Bafadal, I., Timan, A., & Supriyanto, A. (2023). Do leadership style and work culture influence school achievement? *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 23(13). <https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v23i13.6372>
- Hashi, M., & Hock, O. (2022). Crisis Leadership in Civic State Building: The Case of Clan Federalism in Somalia. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(10), 103–134. <https://doi.org/http://journalppw.com>
- He, W., & Xiao, J. (2020). The Emergency Online Classes During COVID-19 Pandemic: A Chinese University Case Study. *Asian Journal of Distance Education*, 15(2).
<https://doi.org/https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1285321.pdf>

Administrative Leadership during the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Hidayat, S. N., Sumardjoko, B., & Muhibbin, A. (2023). Transformational leadership competence of principals in improving teacher performance. *Edunesia: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 4(2), 587–597. <https://doi.org/10.51276/edu.v4i2.403>
- Hu, C., Yun, K. H., Su, Z., & Xi, C. (2022). Effective crisis management during adversity: Organizing resilience capabilities of firms and sustainable performance during COVID-19. *Sustainability*, 14(20), 13664. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142013664>
- Jabbar, B. F. (2022). Leadership style: Analyzing the influence of transformational leadership on Organizational Innovation. *Journal of Humanities and Education Development*, 4(3), 172–184. <https://doi.org/10.22161/jhed.4.3.21>
- Jameel, A., & Ahmad, A. R. (2020). The mediating role of job satisfaction between leadership style and performance of academic staff. *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 24(04), 2399–2414. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3551155
- Jameel, A. S., & Ahmad, A. R. (2020). *The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Job Satisfaction among Academic Staff*. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3514442
- Kaplan, L. S., & Owings, W. A. (2017). Motivating people to accomplish organizational goals. *Organizational Behavior for School Leadership*, 106–138. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315669502-4>
- Karim, L. (2024). Transformational leadership style, transactional leadership style and job satisfaction. *Jurnal Economic Resource*, 7(1), 130–143. <https://doi.org/10.57178/jer.v7i1.906>
- Khan, I. U., Amin, R. U., & Saif, N. (2022). Individualized consideration and idealized influence of transformational leadership: Mediating role of inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2022.2076286>
- Kim, J. (2022). The impact of leadership style on teachers' organizational commitment. *International Journal of Social Science and Education Research Studies*, 02(08). <https://doi.org/10.55677/ijssers/v02i08y2022-02>
- Kurniawan, D., Tambunan, D. B., & Dewi, G. C. (2024). Relationships among crisis leadership, Innovation Capability, implementation of Business Continuity Management, and sustainable performance in the COVID-19 pandemic. *The South East Asian Journal of Management*, 18(1), 130–155. <https://doi.org/10.21002/seam.v18i1.1457>
- Lall-Trail, S. (2021, August 23). *22 employee engagement survey questions you should ask (updated 2023)*. Culture Amp. <https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/employee-engagement-survey-questions>

- Lemoine, P. A., Richardson, M. D. (2020). Planning for Higher Education Institutions: Chaos and the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Educational Planning*, 27(3), 43-57. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1279907.pdf>
- Martin, J. (2020). A framework for crisis leadership using the Martin Library leadership definition. *Library Leadership and Management*, 34(3), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.5860/LLM.V34I3.7442>
- Mau, T. A., Callahan, R. F., & Ohemeng, F. (2022). Guest editorial: Leadership in times of crisis: The intersection of political and administrative leadership. *International Journal of Public Leadership*, 18(2), 93–100. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijpl-05-2022-118>
- Ministry of Education, Guyana, MISU. (2021, January 6). *Misu admin*. <https://education.gov.gy/en/index.php/media2/external-news/4541-education-sector-stood-strong-amidst-pandemic-in-2021>
- Muczyk, J. P., & Holt, D. T. (2008). Toward a cultural contingency model of leadership. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 14(4), 277–286. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051808315551>
- Nanda, S., & Ryan, J. M. (2023). School closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Pandemic Pedagogies*, 58–72. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003324096-5>
- Ndone, J. (2024). *Beyond Negative Emotions: The Effects of Positive Emotions and Inoculation on Organizational Outcomes after a Crisis*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4762387>
- Noor, S., Isa, F. Md., & Mazhar, F. F. (2020). Online teaching practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Educational Process: International Journal*, 9(3), 169–184. <https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2020.93.4>
- Ochavillo, S. G. (2020). A Paradigm Shift of Learning in Maritime Education amidst COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 9(6). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1277930.pdf>
- Ozensoy, A. (2021). Education experiences of Syrian refugee students in Mus during the Covid 19. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 13(1), 274–289. <https://doi.org/https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1285553.pdf>
- Razak, M., Azfarozza Wan Athmar, W., Durani, N., Johar Salleh, A., & Ilyana Binti Hamdan, N. (2019). Effective communication as a tool for achieving organizational goals. *KnE Social Sciences*, 3(14), 380. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v3i14.4324>
- Rehan, A., Thorpe, D., & Heravi, A. (2024). Leadership Practices and Communication Framework for PROJECT SUCCESS – the construction sector. *Organization*,

Administrative Leadership during the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Technology and Management in Construction: An International Journal*, 16(1), 204–223. <https://doi.org/10.2478/otmcj-2024-0016>
- Reidhead, C. (2021). Effective communication as a tool for achieving organizational goals and Objectives. *Journal of Economics, Finance and Management Studies*, 04(04). <https://doi.org/10.47191/jefms/v4-i4-07>
- Rydzak, W. (2022). Communication in a crisis situation in developing countries. *POZNAŃ SCHOOL OF DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS*, 189–194. <https://doi.org/10.56091/psde2.14>
- Steyn, R. (2020). Leadership styles and organisational structure. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies*, 10(3), 98. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijhrs.v10i3.17295>
- Taheri, F. (2022). Decision-making in crisis situation: How do leaders manage scarce resources? *Journal of Resource Management and Decision Engineering*, 1(1), 17–22. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.jrmde.1.1.4>
- Toyon, M. A. (2021). Explanatory sequential design of Mixed Methods Research: Phases and challenges. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science (2147- 4478)*, 10(5), 253–260. <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v10i5.1262>
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2020). *The Impact of Covid-19 on Education Insights from Education at a Glance 2020*. <https://www.oecd.org/education/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-insights-education->
- Thomas, B. (2022). *The Role of Purposive Sampling Technique as a Tool for Informal Choices in a Social Sciences in Research Methods*. JustAgriculture. <https://justagriculture.in/files/newsletter/2022/march/010.pdf>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2020). *Education Response to the COVID-19 in the Caribbean*. <https://en.unesco.org/caribbean-education-response>
- Ul Hosna, A., Islam, S., & Hamid, M. (2021). A review of the relationship of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration with sustainable employees performance. *International Journal of Progressive Sciences and Technologies*, 25(1), 322. <https://doi.org/10.52155/ijpsat.v25.1.2798>
- Uwandu, L. I., Udo-Anyanwu, A. J., & Okorie, O. N. (2022). *Participative management and effective communication as predictors of job performance of library staff in Federal Universities in South East Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria*. DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Administrative Leadership during the COVID-19 Pandemic

https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/6723?utm_source=digitalcommons.unl.edu%2Flibphilprac%2F6723&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages

World Bank Group. (2020). COVID-19 Crisis Response.
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/who-we-are/news/coronavirus-covid19>

World Health Organization. (2024, January 24). *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic*. World Health Organization.
<https://www.who.int/europe/emergencies/situations/covid-19>

Zerfass, A., & Volk, S. C. (2020). Aligning and linking communication with organizational goals. *The Handbook of Public Sector Communication*, 417–434.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119263203.ch27>

Lydia Narain is a Lecturer and Coordinator (Natural and Technical Sciences Unit, Department of Curriculum and Instruction), Faculty of Education and Humanities at the University of Guyana. She is an early-career academic and a Doctor of Education (EdD) student. She has published studies in the areas of Education, Science, and Business.

Research Supervisors' Perceptions of a Bachelor of Education Research Programme at the University of Guyana

Pamela Rose

Abstract

This article reports on the identification phase of a larger action research study to understand faculty research supervisors' perceptions of the Bachelor of Education research programme at the University of Guyana. The study used qualitative interviews and grounded theory analysis to explore how research supervisors viewed the programme. Findings indicated that research supervisors perceived the programme to have the potential to bridge theory and practice. However, they perceived that several areas could be improved to better prepare supervisors for research supervision and teacher practitioners for more effective engagement with the research process. Implications of the study indicate a need for the continuous professional development of research supervisors and institutional support for teacher practitioners as researchers. The study contributes insights into faculty perspectives for programme improvement.

Keywords: action research, research supervision, professional development, teacher education

Introduction

In higher education, research conducted by teacher practitioners is a vital component of many teacher education programmes. Research suggests that teacher practitioners' engagement with research activities enhances their research knowledge and skills, helps them bridge the gap between theory and practice, and contributes to more evidence-based practices (Flores, 2018). However, the complex and demanding nature of research often challenges teacher practitioners who engage in research activities and their mentors who supervise them (Crawford, 2022). Since research supervisors play a key role in influencing teachers' development as practitioner-researchers, it is essential to understand their supervision experiences within research programmes.

The Faculty of Education and Humanities offers a Bachelor of Education research programme for teacher practitioners. Despite ongoing concerns from faculty members regarding the quality of research produced by these practitioners, the underlying factors

affecting the quality of research output have not been adequately examined. This study reports a phase of an action research project that explored teacher educators' perceptions of the Bachelor of Education programme at the University of Guyana. The study aimed to gain insights into the research supervisors' perceptions of the programme to assess its effectiveness, challenges, and overall impact. Assessment of the programme is necessary to address the quality of its output. Being the initial phase of an action research project, this study contributes to the expanding body of scholarship that highlights the role of action research in identifying opportunities for continuous programme review and improvement.

Theoretical Lens

As an action researcher striving to improve undergraduate research experiences, I approached the study through a pragmatic theoretical lens (Creswell, 2003). The pragmatic lens focuses on practical, real-world issues and their consequences. Through this lens, researchers can explore and understand connections between knowledge and action in context, as individuals in institutional settings can experience action and change differently (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). They assert that this lens is suitable for researching processes in institutions where people's ideas and beliefs are valued as tools for problem-solving, especially what they view as working or not working. The pragmatic lens seemed appropriate given that this research focused on supervisors' perspectives.

Action Research

Action research is distinguished from other types of research through its pragmatic lens. It aims to produce actionable processes throughout the research rather than contribute to existing knowledge or draw conclusions from datasets (Coghlan, 2023). Action research is not new because it has long been associated with teachers' professional growth and development (Mertler, 2017). However, renewed interest in action research has emerged from recognising its potential to produce the teaching and learning outcomes desired for dynamic 21st century educational systems. Although there are several action research models, such as collaborative and participatory action research, at the heart of all action research models is solving immediate problems through a multi-stage, non-linear, and cyclical process. This process typically begins with identifying problems of practice,

followed by planning, data collection and analysis, developing action plans, and ongoing reflection (Coghlan, 2019). Despite some perceived challenges, such as the tension between the insider-outsider roles that action researchers adopt, the growing body of literature on action research studies has pointed to its effectiveness as a tool for empowering educators to improve their practice (Gibbs et al., 2017).

Action Research in Higher Education

Studies have shown the value of using action research in higher education (Cabaroglu, 2014; Aldridge et al., 2021). Research that used mixed methods has found impacts such as enhanced self-efficacy, self-direction, self-awareness, improved problem-solving skills, and enhanced autonomous learning (Aldridge et al., 2021). Qualitative approaches have reported gains in understanding power relationships and leveraging this understanding to secure buy-in to implement new ideas in teaching and improve classroom teaching and learning conditions (Abraham, 2014; Kitchen & Stevens, 2008). The gains reported from action research underscore its impact in higher education, where field experience is used to identify a problem of practice and to apply practical research as a tool for change (Coghlan, 2023).

Research Supervision in Higher Education

Research supervision in higher education is a multifaceted process that involves supervisors guiding student researchers through key research stages while simultaneously fulfilling multiple and sometimes conflicting roles such as mentor, director, advisor, editor, and examiner (Ädel et al., 2023; Rowley & Slack, 2004). Beyond technical guidance, supervisors must assess students' research skills to provide tailored support, particularly at the undergraduate level, where students often require more structured support (Agricola et al., 2020). Research indicates that this complex process is frequently a site of struggle, regardless of whether it is conducted through apprenticeship, mentor/mentee relationships, communities of practice, or hybrid models (Kaur et al., 2021; Lee, 2008). Key challenges identified in the literature include variations in supervision quality, supervisory approaches, time constraints, students' limited research skills, difficulties in adhering to timelines, and the need for greater transparency with supervision processes (Askew et al., 2016; Al-Doubi, 2019; Malcolm, 2020). Ädel et al. (2023), in their study on undergraduate

thesis supervision in Sweden, found that supervisors varied in their interpretations of their roles, approaches, and conceptualisation of the thesis as either a product or a process. These differences can significantly impact student satisfaction and contribute to tensions and conflicts within the supervisory relationship. Sriksam and Seehamongkon (2023) found that based on the Priority Needs Index Modified (PNI modified), student teachers' most critical research competency was cognitive skills, followed by research practice skills and research mindset in order of importance. A lack of these skills and mindset can further complicate the supervision process, making it more demanding and overwhelming for students and supervisors. Although a robust body of literature exists on research supervision in higher education, most studies focus on the postgraduate level, and the domain of undergraduate supervision is relatively understudied (Roberts & Seaman, 2018; Al-Dubi, 2019).

The Bachelor of Education Research Programme

The Faculty of Education and Humanities (University of Guyana) Bachelor of Education programme is designed for early childhood, primary, and secondary teacher practitioners. It ensures that teacher practitioners have undergraduate research support across three thirteen-week semesters. A course on research methods is conducted in the third semester of teacher practitioners' penultimate year. In their final year, they are exposed to two research courses: a research proposal and a research report, in which they conduct independent research under the supervision of a faculty member. The process culminates with teacher practitioners submitting a thesis to partially fulfil their bachelor's degree. The research approach in the programme follows a traditional, predefined, and linear format, a fixed sequence from problem identification to conclusion (Kuh, 2008). An apprenticeship model is commonly used, where an expert-novice relationship exists, and support is provided in many one-to-one sessions (Zaheer & Munir, 2020). A flexible, iterative, and reflexive process, often used in qualitative, exploratory, and action research, is absent.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that supervisors are expressing dissatisfaction with the quality of research produced, and teacher practitioners are reporting being overwhelmed by the research process. However, while these anecdotes exist, mentors'

challenges while serving as supervisors in the research programme appear not to have been formally documented.

Research Objective and Purpose

This exploratory study aimed to inform the development of subsequent action research cycles within a broader study focused on programme review and improvement. The purpose of this study is to explore research supervisors' perceptions of the Bachelor of Education programme at the University of Guyana, Berbice Campus.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study:
What do research supervisors perceive as the strengths and challenges of the current programme in preparing teacher practitioners to engage effectively in research?

Method

This exploratory study is a preliminary investigation. It is the initial stage (problem identification phase) of a larger action research project that seeks to gain insights for programme improvement. It was designed to explore the perspectives of research supervisors mentoring teacher practitioners. Action research links research and practice and has the potential to address inadequacies observed in practice (Mertler, 2017).

Setting

The research was conducted at the University of Guyana, Berbice Campus, the smaller of the university's two main campuses, with fewer than 1,000 students enrolled. The Division of Education and Humanities, in which the research programme is offered, operates as a subdivision of the Faculty of Education and Humanities and comprises four departments: Foundation and Education Management, Language and Cultural Studies, History and Caribbean Studies, and Curriculum and Instruction. The division is managed by a coordinator who oversees the students' assignment to 15 research supervisors (nine part-time and six full-time). Each supervisor is randomly assigned a maximum of 10 students from the respective departments. Course outlines provided by the departments guide each supervisor.

Participants

Four participants — two females and two males — were purposely selected from a population of six full-time experienced faculty researchers. The criteria for selecting these participants included their willingness and availability for the interviews, experience in teaching at the early childhood, primary, or secondary level, and in supervising teacher practitioners engaged in research across different departments (Language and Cultural Studies, Foundation and Education Management, and Curriculum and Instruction). Of the four research supervisors who participated in this study, one had over 20 years of teaching experience at the early childhood education level, another had over 20 years of teaching experience at the primary education level, and two had more than 20 years of teaching experience at the secondary and tertiary education levels. Each of the four participants had more than five years of research supervision experience from working with teacher practitioners who specialised in early childhood, primary, or secondary education in the Bachelor of Education programme. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned, with participants choosing their pseudonyms. Allowing participants to choose their preferred names better acknowledges their agency and contribution to the research (Wang et al., 2024).

Qualitative Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used to elicit supervisors' general perceptions of the research programme and specific perceptions of its strengths and challenges, and ways to make it more effective. Semi-structured interviews are more suited for comparative analysis focused on identifying a range of items (Atkinson & Delamont, 2010). Each participant participated in an individual interview on Zoom, lasting approximately 20 minutes. (See the interview protocol in the Appendix).

Researcher's Role and Positionality

As the researcher conducting this exploratory study, I acknowledge that my role as a research supervisor influences the research questions I formulate and the assumptions I bring to this study. I have over five years of research mentoring experience in the Bachelor of Education (English Specialisation) programme, which has shaped my insider's knowledge of the programme and my understanding of teacher practitioners' and

supervisors' experience. To mitigate these biases, I interviewed supervisors with more than five years of experience supervising research across various programmes. I sought feedback from colleagues to identify potential biases in my research questions, designed my interview questions to capture diverse perspectives, and conducted participant validation of transcripts to ensure accuracy and credibility. My advisor conducted coding checks. I also emphasised the research's purpose and exploratory nature to encourage participants to share openly and provide honest responses. I used memos to remain open to identifying findings that challenged my initial assumptions throughout the coding and data analysis process.

Data Analysis

The study used a qualitative grounded theory approach to data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This is a common analytical approach in qualitative research, useful for exploratory studies, where research direction may evolve. It develops themes from comparisons of text segments and can accurately and comprehensively provide a range of experiences and perceptions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory is useful in exploratory studies where the research direction may evolve (Mey, 2024). While grounded theory is traditionally associated with theory building, this study used its analytical lens to generate insights that can inform the study's evolving research design in subsequent action research cycles, rather than focusing on theory construction.

Each Zoom recording was listened to repeatedly, and interviews were transcribed. Data from each interview was analysed as a distinct and separate set. In vivo coding was used to extract keywords and sentences related to the categories suggested by the focus of the research questions. Categories were compared across data sets and grouped and refined to explore relationships between them and develop topics and themes from the data.

Table 1 illustrates an example of the coding process for category generation.

Table 1

Sample of Data Analysis

<i>Coding categories</i>	<i>Key descriptors/phrases</i>	<i>Illustrative examples</i>
perceptions of the good programme strengths and loopholes limitations	embryonic state	<i>I believe that the programme is still very much in its embryonic state.</i>
	insufficient time	<i>The time is inadequate to produce the kind of research. We are attempting to do too much in too limited time.</i>

Ethical Consideration

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained to use the site for data collection and interviewing supervisors. Supervisors were recruited by email. Verbal confirmation was solicited during follow-up telephone calls. All supervisors were provided a consent form to participate. Participants who consented to be interviewed were asked to provide convenient times to meet. Once the time schedules were confirmed, each supervisor was sent a Zoom link for their interview. All interviews were recorded on my computer using the Zoom recording feature. To conceal identities, participant pseudonyms were used to label the transcripts, and participants were not described under their pseudonyms in the study.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

All transcribed interviews were sent to participants to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts. My research supervisor conducted coding checks. Analytic memos were used during the process of coding and analysing the data.

Findings

This research aimed to gain insights into research supervisors' perceptions of a Bachelor of Education research programme for teacher practitioners. A primary theme that emerged from the findings related to the programme's strength is its effectiveness and overall value in supporting a theory-practice connection. Other themes related to teacher practitioners' readiness, concerns about inconsistencies in supervision and assessment, and a need for supervisor development and overall programme improvement.

Programme effectiveness and overall value

Faculty research supervisors perceived that the programme could potentially develop teacher practitioners' research skills and connections to practice. They admitted that even though it is not a perfect programme, teacher practitioners (students) can benefit from the programme by developing research skills and making connections to practice if the programme is delivered well; if teacher practitioners do their work, select relevant topics, and are guided well. Through the programme, "students will be exposed to a wide variety of information and research skills if done how it is supposed to be done, if guided properly, and if students do their work themselves" (Amer). Teacher practitioners will benefit "once they do the research themselves; they get to develop research skills" (Utopia). However, the nature of the topic is another factor that determines the value:

... it depends on the nature of the research, for instance, it depends on the topic the student chooses. If they choose a topic that is relevant and not something that is overworked, then they would be adding to the body of knowledge. As teachers, I know in the secondary school as well as the primary school system, the children do little projects, SBA, and they are the ones who would have to help the children along, so armed with the research skills, they can transfer this knowledge in helping the children. They can use this information to inform their practice as well as their content. Some of them feel that they do not have to focus on classroom challenges. (Bynes)

Some of the topics they do help them to be better teachers, not teachers, I don't want to say teachers. Some of the topics they do help them to teach concepts better and understand how children learn, and administratively, some of them are

administrators, and they do topics on management and so on, so it gives them a better understanding of their jobs and to perform effectively. (Cazembe)

Teacher Practitioners' Readiness

Faculty supervisors discussed teacher practitioners' inadequate understanding and lack of meaningful engagement with research. Utopia stated, "Students do not understand some concepts." Cazembe indicated that "students are not grounded to engage in meaningful research" and further suggested:

If we do a sample of students, we will find that about six out of ten students are petrified by research because they don't see it as something they are prepared to do. Only five percent are equipped to do serious research. Students have vague understanding and limited background in research.

Bynes mentioned that even the 'good' students struggle with research: "I have found in my experience that some students may be very good students, but when it comes to the research, students have difficulty in conducting and completing the entire research and the proposal as well as the report."

According to Amer, "very few students are doing their own work." Cazembe supported this statement: "In my view, it does not have a strong effect. Very few students are doing their own work just to get over the course and graduate, not learning anything much. Just do it to pass."

Inconsistencies in Supervision and Assessment

Faculty research supervisors raised concerns about inconsistencies in supervision and assessment across the programme. They indicated variations in interpretations of the programme, supervision styles, and grading criteria. Cazembe emphasised the need to address disparities, stating, "Whilst it is a good programme or course, there are many loopholes that we need to look at, and number one is how the supervision is being done. I think supervisors across, they got different perspectives on how this supervision is being done." Utopia reinforced this concern by explaining how different supervisors approach supervision: "For example, I am a research supervisor, and my approach to teaching them is from what I have learned how to do research. I know certain ways how to do research." Amer pointed to different grading criteria: "Even though the students are

expected to look at the same headings, I find that in some departments, the ones I have worked in our faculty, the rubric is different. It is not standard in terms of allocation of marks.”

Supervisor Development

Faculty research supervisors also perceived that they lacked opportunities for professional development in research; they required ongoing professional development training, alternative models of supervision, additional resources, and a program review to improve the current approach to research supervision. Utopia captured the perception of the lack of opportunities in the following extract:

As a research supervisor, education and learning are current, and I would like, from time to time, I am given instruction too. I am being tutored or given more information on how to do research to improve my current knowledge, so that I do not remain stagnant or stuck in one way.

The following extracts portray the call for ongoing professional development: “Even if it’s once yearly, we need to have a little seminar with our research supervisors and see what is happening. Maybe we can have persons say, ‘this is how we do it’, ‘this is an approach you can use’” (Utopia). Bynes supported this recommendation with the comment that: “We need workshop sessions with supervisors to keep abreast with current practices”. Amer echoed a similar idea: “We need our students to be on top of their game, but we also need our supervisors to be on top of the game. They must know what are the changes. What are the current changes, and they must know how to implement it.”

Programme Improvement

All faculty research supervisors reflected on the inadequacies of the current supervision model and suggested a need for alternative models of supervision with more cohesion and collaboration across the programme. Utopia described an approach with more collaboration between the teacher practitioners and the supervisor:

A different kind of supervision not only brings the work and marking it. I believe we need to be participant observers when they are doing their actual study. We need to include a part where supervisor’s presence is there. To me, that gives the student an understanding they have to really do the work.

Bynes also suggested an approach with more collaboration among supervisors:

We need to sit together as supervisors and we should discuss how actually the supervision is done. Then we should look. Let us say we look at the background of the study, we should discuss what should be the main component of the background when you are writing the background, how it should be written, what are the things we should look for.

Cazembe also proposed a different supervision model: "Supervisors are marking the work they supervised. We should have a different marker, a second marker."

Faculty research supervisors also reflected on the inadequacy of the time for research to be taught in the programme. Amer remarked that "the time is inadequate," and Cazembe suggested that "we are attempting to do too much in too little time" and "one semester is not enough to teach students to do a complex research project." The need for more resources was also identified, as illustrated in the following extract:

Some of the topics you wouldn't find literature. Literature is rare. Some of the burning issues. Some of the topics that students really want to research. You are saying as a supervisor that it can go, but the other thing is that the literature restricts you from doing the research, and the other thing is that it deters the student from pursuing that issue. (Utopia)

Cazembe extended the idea of resources by highlighting the need for human resources for the programme:

We engage in the business of supervision, monitoring what students do, gauging their writing, and I think it becomes burdensome if we are thinking about our resources. We should at least have two supervisors, but we do not have the resources to do that. We need to work out an adequate supervisor-student ratio.

Bynes commented, "Some of the topics that they currently do are overworked or overused, and I think we need to have a way to look at that so we determine what kinds of topics they need to do in education." Amer proposed resources to address the concern: "We need a database with topics already done to determine overuse of the topics."

In addition, Cazembe spoke specifically about pedagogical resources related to improving teacher practitioners' writing and reading skills: "Because you are struggling to

produce a good paragraph, then you are going to struggle to produce a good research project. It lends itself to students' plagiarism. We need a writing centre with writing specialists to support supervisors." Cazembe explained that the focus should also be on reading:

We have to question the kind of reading courses we have and whether these courses are adequately preparing our teachers to become researchers. Many of the reading courses are designed to teach teachers how to teach reading. We need to focus on how to make our teachers readers. We have to expose students to approaches in inquiry in several fields.

Programme review was another area mentioned to improve the programme. Cazembe discussed an administrative intervention for programme review, pointing out that the "programme needs to be continuously and vigorously interrogated" so that "we pay special attention to research and the requirement of research and to what extent our programme facilitates research." Supervisors recommended connecting with other institutions and finding out, "How are other institutions approaching research, and how can we benefit from these approaches" (Amer). According to Cazembe, the administration needs to take the initiative: "I think it is not a matter of the lecturers themselves looking for what needs to be done, but I think the institution as a whole needs to recognise it."

Discussion

This study explored faculty research supervisors' perceptions of the Bachelor of Education research programme for teacher practitioners. The research question focused on the strengths and challenges of the programme in preparing teacher practitioners to engage effectively in research. The findings indicate that although the supervisors perceived that the programme could enable teacher practitioners to bridge theory and practice, its challenges reveal areas for improvement.

Generally, research supervisors in this study perceived that the research programme was good in its intention and overall value, but its effectiveness depended on teacher practitioners' readiness, supervisors' development, consistency in practices, and a programme review leading to improvement. Supervisors' perceptions of the programme's

overall value in bridging theory and practice were expected as they fit the arguments for practitioner research in the literature (Aldridge et al., 2021). Supervisors' views align with the perspective that these kinds of programmes enable teacher practitioners to respond to the complex processes of teaching and learning, and to develop an understanding of what they do, how, and why (Crawford, 2022).

An area of challenge identified by supervisors was teacher practitioners' readiness for research. All supervisors in this study discussed this concern in the context of teacher practitioners' limited understanding and background in research and a counterproductive mindset. Finding limited understanding and background in research was partly unexpected because teacher practitioners are exposed to a course in research methodology before supervision. These perceptions of teacher practitioners' lack of readiness highlight the complex nature of research, as Kaur et al. (2021) revealed, suggesting that supervisors' requests for more time and additional support in research writing and reading appear valid. Because these skills rank high on the Priority Needs Index for teacher research (Srikham & Seehamongkon, 2023), more creative ways should be explored for teacher practitioners to nurture a growth mindset and mitigate the perceived challenge of their limited understanding and background in research.

Another challenge is related to supervisors' development and inconsistency in supervisory approaches. These findings support Ädel et al.'s (2023) study of undergraduate research supervisors whose diverse practices were informed by varied perspectives on the thesis and interpretations of their roles as supervisors. While research supervisors' styles cannot be specified through regulations, clarity on the roles supervisors should adopt, and capacity building for supervision will likely standardise the supervision approach and boost supervisor and teacher-practitioner relationships. These factors could be linked to the counterproductive mindsets of teacher practitioners perceived by research supervisors (Askew, 2016; Al-Doubi et al., 2019).

Regarding research supervisors' perception of alternative models for programme improvement, even though the research literature identifies alternative models (Lee 2008; Kaur et al., 2021), there is not necessarily a correct approach to supervising research. Given its multifaceted and complex nature (Agricola et al., 2020), alternative models offering

more collaborative, structured support and resources might be worth pursuing. The expectations and requirements written in course outlines, and the current supervision model, might not be sufficient to build confidence and strengthen knowledge contribution and production in research. Now may be the ideal time for a programme review that research supervisors have identified as key to improving the Bachelor of Education research programme.

Limitations

As the problem identification phase of an action research study, this exploratory study collected data from a small sample. It was restricted to full-time faculty members, so its findings cannot be generalized across both campuses. In addition, it did not triangulate multiple forms of data, so the findings are suggestive. Nevertheless, as a reflective practice, this study provides preliminary insights, creating a foundation for future research incorporating a broader range of participants across both campuses and multiple data sources to enable deeper exploration for ongoing programme improvement.

Implications

A practical implication of this study is that collaborative research involving supervisors and teacher practitioners, and more flexible iterative processes, could reduce supervision challenges. When teacher educators and their students engage in a collaborative action research process, both become more reflective, critical, and analytical, generating and transforming knowledge (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Also, when undergraduates engage in iterative research processes, they become more engaged and feel less pressured (Corwin et al., 2018). Flexible approaches encourage adaptability and deep engagement with research and reduce the pressure to get it right early (Corwin et al., 2018).

In addition, establishing structured professional development sessions for research supervisors could promote consistency in supervisory practices. Likewise, implementing student support initiatives, including research reading and writing seminars or workshops

within a writing centre, could strengthen foundational research skills. Through this type of investment, the programme's overall effectiveness could be improved.

Conclusion

This study provides preliminary insights into the perceptions of research supervisors about the strengths and challenges of the Bachelor of Education research programme. It reveals optimism in the programme's potential and concerns about institutional support provided to supervisors and teacher practitioners. Creating more opportunities for supervisors and teacher practitioners to receive more structured research support and exploring collaborative research avenues seem necessary to improve the programme. As this research is exploratory, ongoing reflection on the programme in future research cycles is necessary for continuous improvement.

References

- Abraham, A. (2014). Making sense of power relations in a Malaysian English as a second language academic writing classroom. *Educational Action Research*, 22(4), 472–48
- Ädel, A., Skogs, J., Lindgren, C., & Stridfeldt, M. (2023). The supervisor and student in Bachelor thesis supervision: A broad repertoire of sometimes conflicting roles. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 14(2), 207–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2022.2162560>
- Agricola, B. T., van der Schaaf, M. F., Prins, F. J., & van Tartwijk, J. (2020). The development of research supervisors' pedagogical content knowledge in a lesson study project. *Educational Action Research*, 30(2), 261–280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2020.1832551>
- Al-Doubi, S. H., Fawzi, H., & Walters, J. (2019). Undergraduate research supervision: A case study of supervisors' perceptions at Yanbu University College. *Higher Education Studies*, 9(4), 112–119. <https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v9n4p112>
- Aldridge, J.M., Paul, E. Rijken, P.E. & Fraser, B. J. (2021). Improving learning environments through whole-school collaborative action research. *Learning Environments Res*, 24, 183–205
- Askew, C., Dixon, R., McCormick, R., Callaghan, K., Wang, G., & Shulruf, B. (2016).

Research Supervisors' Perceptions of a Bachelor of Education Research Programme

- Facilitators and barriers to doctoral supervision: A case study in a research-intensive university in New Zealand. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 11, 467–483. <https://doi.org/10.28945/3626>
- Atkinson, P., & Delamont, S. (2010). *SAGE qualitative research methods*. SAGE.
- Cabaroglu, N. (2014). Professional development through action research: Impact on self-efficacy. *System*, 44, 79–88.
- Coghlan D. (2023). Action research. In Glăveanu V. P. (Ed.), *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of the Possible* (pp. 9–16). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-90913-0_180
- Coghlan D. (2019). *Doing action research in your own organization*. Sage Publications.
- Corwin, L., Runyon, C., Ghanem, E., et al. (2018). Effects of discovery, iteration, and collaboration in laboratory courses on undergraduates' research career intentions fully mediated by student ownership. *CBE Life Sciences Education*, 17 (20). <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.17-10-0207>
- Crawford, R. (2022). Action research as evidence-based practice: Enhancing explicit teaching and learning through critical reflection and collegial peer observation. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 47(12). <https://doi.org/10.14221/1835-517X.6065>
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Darling-Hammond, L. & McLaughlin, M. W. (2011). Policies that support professional development in an era of reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 92(6).
- Flores, M. A. (2018). Linking teaching and research in initial teacher education: knowledge mobilisation and research-informed practice. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 44(5), 621–636. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2018.1516351>
- Gibbs, P., Cartney, P., Wilkinson, K., Parkinson, P., Cunningham, S., James-Reynolds, C., Zoubir, T., Brown, V., Barter, P. Sumner, P., MacDonald, A., Dayananda, A. & Pitt, A. (2017). Literature review on the use of action research in higher education. *Educational Action Research*, 25(1), 3–22.
- Kaur, A., Kumar, V., & Noman, M. (2021). Partnering with doctoral students in research supervision: Opportunities and challenges. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 41(3), 789–803. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1871326>

- Kelly, L. M., & Cordeiro, M. (2020). Three principles of pragmatism for research on organisational processes. *Methodological Innovations*, 13(2), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059799120937242>
- Kitchen, J., & Stevens, D. (2008). Action research in teacher education: two teacher-educators practice action research as they introduce action research to preservice teachers. *Action Research*, 6(1), 7–28.
- Kuh, G. D. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Lee, A. (2008). How are doctoral students supervised? Concepts of doctoral research supervision. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(3), 267–281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070802049202>
- Malcolm, M. (2020). The challenge of achieving transparency in undergraduate honours-level dissertation supervision. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 28(1), 101–117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1776246>.
- Mertler, C. A. (2017). *Action research: Improving schools and empowering educators* (5th ed.). Sage.
- Mey, G. (2024). Grounded Theory Methodology. In Wolfradt, U., Allolio-Näcke, L., & Ruppel, P. (eds) *Cultural Psychology*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-45155-4_18
- Roberts, L., & Seaman, K. (2018) Good undergraduate dissertation supervision: Perspectives of supervisors and dissertation coordinators. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 23(1), 28-40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2017.1412971>
- Rowley, J., and F. Slack. 2004. What is the future for undergraduate dissertations? *Education and Training* 46 (4): 176–181. doi:10.1108/00400910410543964.
- Srikham, O., & Seehamongkon, Y. (2023). The development of a model for enhancing research competencies in the classroom of student teachers. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 12(2), 124–133. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v12n2p124>
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Wang, S., Ramdani, J. M., Sun, S. (Alice), Bose, P., & Gao, X. (Andy). (2024). Naming research participants in qualitative language learning research: Numbers, pseudonyms, or real names? *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2023.2298737>

Zaheer, M., & Munir, S. (2020). Research in distance learning: Issues and challenges. *Asian Association of Open University Journal*, 15(2), 131–142.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Tell me your thoughts on our current research programme for teacher practitioners.
2. From your perspective, what are some strengths of our current research programme?
3. From your perspective, what are some challenges of our current research approach?
4. From your perspective, how can we improve our research approach to prepare teacher practitioners to engage effectively in research?
5. From your perspective, what would we require to develop and implement such an approach?
6. What else would you like to add?

Dr. Pamela Rose is a faculty member in the Departments of Language and Cultural Studies and Curriculum and Instruction. Her research focuses on developing innovative approaches to language teaching and learning, enhancing teacher preparation and professional development, and designing project-based experiences to enrich teaching and learning in higher education.

Publication Rights

Note that the papers accepted become the copyright of the *Journal of Education and Humanities*, unless an agreement is arranged specifically. It is the condition of publication that authors vest copyright in their articles, including abstracts, to the University of Guyana. This enables us to ensure full copyright protection and to disseminate the article and the journal to the widest possible readership as appropriate. Authors may, of course, use the article elsewhere after publication without prior permission from the University of Guyana, provided that acknowledgement is given to the *Journal of Education and Humanities* as the original source of publication.



Detail from: Oliver Smith. *Female/La Femelle*. Oil on canvas with silicone, 3' x 2', 2021

**Faculty of Education and Humanities
University of Guyana
Turkeyen, Georgetown
Tel. 592-222-4923**