

Beyond Schools and Jobs:
How Can Education Empower
Women and Girls to “Become?”

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Abstract

Over the past 75 years, the development agencies in the Global North have been delivering unrequested interventions to empower women and girls in the Global South through various programmes, including education. However, women and girls in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East continue to suffer through vulnerabilities produced by structural uncertainties and dangers created by the same system that delivers these interventions. This is inherently connected to the colonial and neo-colonial projects, which have destroyed the rich philosophical and knowledge structures of the Global South.

This thesis critically examines modern philosophies and ancient wisdoms to formulate a framework that can facilitate the empowerment of women and girls by answering the question: *do educational experiences empower women in non-Western societies?* This thesis critiques the mainstream empowerment and development discourse and relevance of ancient wisdom by addressing the coloniality that persists in development programmes and educational approaches that erroneously assume a deficit of empowerment and prior knowledge.

This research adopts a qualitative research approach with a three-method process that includes both mainstream and ancient analytical and theoretical frameworks. The insight generated by this research has contributed to new knowledge in academia, policy, and practice in this field by identifying the interconnected importance of; a) informal education, b) traditional knowledge systems, c) ancient wisdoms, and d) the meaning of empowerment and wellbeing for women through their lived experiences.

The key findings indicate an intricate relationship between wellbeing and empowerment. The findings further show women are already empowered. As part of the recommendations of this thesis, a proposed framework grounded in humility, co-creation, and self-governance advocates for an alternative engagement to facilitate the realisation of empowerment. In addition, one can manage the external world with joy through the realisation of inner strengths, which is true empowerment in an uncertain and dangerous world.

Keywords: empowerment, wellbeing, education, ancient wisdom, women, girls, indigenous practices.

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Signed: Claudia Milena Adler

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. Adler', written over a light grey rectangular background.

Date: 07.04.2022

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Dedication

I dedicate this PhD to my mother, Erlinda Zapata Zuluaga and Grandmother, Graciela Zuluaga Aristizabal. My mother has been my most ardent supporter, loving me wholly as we both navigate through the peaks and troughs of life. Her dedication and love have presented an unyielding beacon that encourages me to continue forwards. If it were not for your bravery as a young woman, as you ventured into your unknown, I would not be where I am today. I am deeply grateful to you. I also pay tribute to my late grandfather, Ruben Zapata, the only father I have ever known who loved me and taught me to persevere.

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Sometimes it is better not to know exactly what something entails, how much work, dedication, and perseverance you will need to accomplish a milestone. So much of this journey was a first for my family and me. I remember sitting in a pub in York after my graduation ceremony from my MSc in International Humanitarian Affairs with my (now) supervisor, Dr Jo Rose. She leaned in and spoke to my mother and me, encouraging me to look into a PhD. She said enthusiastically that I should really consider it. I do not think I would have thought something like a PhD was within my reach, but her encouragement sparked a curiosity and a belief that perhaps if she thought it as possible, it could be. This opened the door for a three-year journey that led me to work closely with Dr Janaka Jayawickrama, also my supervisor. His pedagogical approach, care, intellectual curiosity, and mentorship facilitated my journey to empowerment. This PhD process would not have been what it is without them. I am deeply grateful for all the hours spent reading through drafts, challenging me, pushing me on, and introducing me to scholars like Isabel Allende, Walter Rodney, Ivan Illich, Paulo Freire, and Arthur Kleinman, to name a few, making my journey less lonely.

At the heart of this acknowledgement are the women who have shared with me their life stories. I connected with their joys, pain, and struggles as they recounted the experiences that made them step out on their own, with a deep sense of ownership of their journeys. The sincerity of these engagements dissolved the researcher and subject relationship, and what emerged was the commonalities that link women to women. I feel honoured to have been trusted with these narratives and have gathered sisters along the way. Similarly, the direction of this PhD guided gently by Dr Janaka Jayawickrama, led me on a delicate self-reflective process that coaxed humility and confidence, and bridged those external differences that separate so many of us. It is difficult to express my immense gratitude for the support shown to me by so many, and as my supervisor once said: "Do not say thank you, just do the same to others." I commit to doing the same.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Rationale

This PhD critically examines global mainstream education and whether it facilitates the empowerment of girls and women living in marginalised and disadvantaged settings. The largely uncontested assumption that mainstream education facilitates empowerment legitimises an education system that guards the interests of a globalised market economy (Illich et al., 1978; Illich; 1977, 1973, 1970). The link between women's empowerment is also at the centre of this critical examination of education. This thesis looks beyond mainstream education approaches and examines traditional knowledge systems, ancient wisdom and philosophies that remain on the margins of a formal education system focused on accreditation (Shiva, 1999).

Education, empowerment, and wellbeing are central concepts in women's development discourse. Women and girls from marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds are part of the social groups that feature on empowerment programme agendas by international development agencies, eager to enhance capabilities and formal participation in all spheres of society (United Nations, 2015). This thesis critically looks at disentangling empowerment from the ontological and epistemological understanding of women mainly from the Global South, who have experienced marginality and rurality (Bush, 2000). The good intentions of teachers, aid workers and health workers that proliferate the space of women's empowerment are largely based on the uncontested assumption that they are devout of empowerment. The political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors that create vulnerable settings from an uneven development context are misconstrued as states of disempowerment (Butler, 2020; Kleinman, 1995). It is from this misconstrued notion of women's empowerment (that resembles murky waters,) that solutions emerge to save those from underdevelopment (Abu-Lughod, 2002, Rodney, 1972).

The justification to this thesis lies in the darker aspect of the European invention of modernity. The enticement of idealism conceals the interlinkage to coloniality (Walter, 2007), which raises the question: are the inequities of a modern neoliberal capitalist system being shouldered by women and girls routinised to suffering from this system's failure? As argued by Kleinman (1995, p.101):

There are routinised forms of suffering that are either shared aspects of human conditions – chronic illness or death – or experiences of deprivation and exploitation and degradation and oppression that certain categories of individuals (the poor, the vulnerable, the defeated) are especially exposed to and others relatively protected from.

The research title 'Beyond Schools and Jobs: How Can Education Empower Women to 'Become'; The 'Beyond' relates to being able through learning to draw out new paths of empowerment. To venture beyond the dictatorship of institutions stems disobedience. This thesis captures the internal struggle to be free from the oppressor (Freire, 1972). In this vein, the thesis draws from the autobiographies of Fidel Castro (1926 – 2016), Mahatma Gandhi (1861 – 1948), and Nelson Mandela (1913 – 2013) who have interwoven strands of rebellion, self-inquiry, and the rapturous pursuit to freedom. It is a paradox that such distinct historical figures share the ability to master 'self-creation.' As Gandhi argued, his ability to take India to independence was made possible by 'experiments' in living (Gandhi, 2001, p.2). Such historical figures left a legacy, irrespective of human failings.

The journey to empowerment and links to wellbeing is a central theme of this thesis. Before embarking on this PhD journey, I was passionate about women's and girls' empowerment and viewed education as a tool to plateau the disproportionate injustices that proliferate the lives of women and girls (World Economic Forum: WEF, 2019). This PhD led me on a journey of reckoning and introspection (M, 2017; Shah, 2011b; Nauriyal, Drummond and Lal, 2006). The qualitative research design to this thesis facilitated my ability to engage authentically as an equal with the narratives of the key stakeholders in this research. Furthermore, the disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, human geography, psychology, economics, and politics, and theories of health, public

health, health economy, and health ecology, and ancient philosophies such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Mayan, and African traditions have all influenced the critical examination of education, empowerment, health, and wellbeing. This thesis applies a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and intradisciplinary approach. The relevance of ancient philosophies was identified by the scoping review through its findings that signalled to a gap within the literature regarding ancient wisdom and indigenous knowledge. Subsequently, in conducting the narrative literature review (Chapter 5) the rich histories have become highly influential to this thesis. For example, the first university established was in India, called *Nalanda* in the 5th century (Nalanda University, 2020), and the Chipko concept (Shiva, 1999) and African traditions like *Ubuntu* (Ngomane, 2019) showcase the depth of knowledge that is overlooked by the Western-centric education system. Moreover, these theories ground the thesis away from a Western colonial normative framework (Ryder, Mackean, *et al.*, 2020).

As a Colombian-born woman who experienced poverty and marginality both in Colombia and as a child refugee in the United Kingdom, the examples of empowerment from my mother and grandmother became removed. My reflection and positionality are discussed in detail in the methodology (Chapter 3). What emerged from my reflective process is that I am a woman from the Global South that comes from a collective culture. We can at times confuse our authentic selves because of daily interactions in Western society. The many tensions that arise from my background are further explored in this thesis, particularly the tension of conducting research based on Southern epistemologies while writing to fit Northern context and norms. English is my second language, and much of my thinking is just as much in Colombian Spanish, and this shows in the manner in which I express myself through my writing. The mainstream education system that shaped much of my life failed to foster a reflective process to interconnect with their empowerment despite different settings. Despite my inability to connect with their journeys to empowerment, the self-governance, determination, perseverance, and freedom that the women before me exercised remained palpable (Allende, 2004). In this, mainstream education is also a tool for division (Bush, 2000). Global

structures weave narratives to preserve the need for dependability on institutions like schooling. Similarly, in this way, my grandmother and mothers' journeys to empowerment were shrouded in vulnerability like a cloth that wraps tightly around many women and girls, that deny their agency (Butler, 2020b; Wright and Jayawickrama, 2020; Lindekens and Jayawickrama, 2019; Shiva, 1999).

The learning that was conducive to the empowerment of my mother and grandmother falls beyond the margins of mainstream education. The formal education system that reduces education to a memorisation and accreditation process, extracts the richness of learning from non-formal and informal education (Giroux, 2001b; Illich, 1970). This thesis examines the breadth of education. From the scoping review (see Chapter 4) and narrative literature review (see Chapter 5) conducted in preparation for this PhD, I came to learn of the influential theory of empowerment through a pedagogical process of introspection (Freire, 1972). The outcome of introspective learning is the emergence of new realities and identities as outlined in the scoping review's findings (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2019; Walker and Loots, 2018; Wilson-Strydom, 2017; Shah, 2016a, 2011a; Omwami, 2015; Seeberg, 2014, 2008; Wiggins, 2012; Dejaeghere and Lee, 2011; Nkechinyere Amadi, 2011; Zhao, 2011). This is discussed as an integral part of the multidimensionality of empowerment as a process to gain control over one's life and foster power in people and communities (Page and Czuba, 1999). This awakening through pedagogy resonates with the work of scholars like Illich (1978; 1973; 1970) and Freire (1972), who advocate for the radical transformation of the modern education system as a tool to regain one's humanity and freedom to enthuse the world with a creativity that lies dormant within. As argued by Freire (1972, p.30):

The pedagogy of the oppressed, a pedagogy which must be forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade.

At the outset of any discussion that involves empowerment arises the inextricable ontological pursuit into understanding one's personhood (Nussbaum, 2000). Butler (2020, pp.14-17) in her critique on individualism, examines equality of persons as encompassing social interdependency, looking beyond the threshold of the body to establish the intrinsic value of all life. Furthermore, the inequality marker that plagues the social, political, economic, geographical, and environmental landscape is a continuum of the expansions in a market economy principled on the maximisation of profit and capital accumulation over wellbeing and the regeneration of the environment (Shiva, 1999; Smith, 1984). Therefore, the political fictions grounded on the epistemological assumption of nature as external, objectified in theory, propagate the superhero, the self-made man, the self-sufficient pioneer as ideals negating the essentiality of human interactions of care (Kleinman, 2020; Smith, 1984).

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the fragmentation of global mainstream education has become an imperative issue from a health and wellbeing perspective (The Economist, 2021; Pandya, 2020). The failed institution that is education has commoditised learning, divorcing learning from health (Pandya, 2020; The World Bank, 2020). In addition, the disenfranchisement of critical thinking and introspection that work towards the liberation of humans (Kariyawasam, 2014; Vivekananda, 1989) is substituted for a system of bondage, as argued by Illich (1973, p.19):

The commodity called "education" and the institution called "school" make each other necessary. The circle can be broken only by a widely shared insight that the institution has come to define the purpose. Values abstractly stated are reduced to mechanical processes that enslave men. This serfdom can be broken only by the joyful self-recognition of the fool who assumes personal responsibility for his folly.

Based on this premise, the thesis looks at challenging the ignorance formed by the non-self – the false illusions that govern our sense of being, stemming from a reductionist colonial Western thinking that dominates institutions such as mainstream healthcare and education, by adopting ancient wisdom and non-

mainstream pedagogical approaches as alternative lenses (M, 2017, 2012; Kleinman, 1995; Rao, no date). In addition, the thesis incorporates a position of humility in acknowledging that “We do not know” neither fully grasp the “Who am I really?” These are central inquiries woven into the chapters of the thesis and the overall research aim and objectives.

1.2 Defining Key Concepts and Terms

This section defines the key concepts and terms that are used throughout this thesis. These key concepts and terms are contested and can be confusing outside of the thesis. The thesis encumbers a wide scope regarding empowerment, education, and wellbeing due to the inequalities on global platforms. As the focus of this research is women in different contexts, and in those different contexts there are different meanings to these concepts and terms.

- **Western:** In this thesis I use this term and concept of Western not from a geographic perspective. What is referred here are the philosophical foundations and practices that have been ‘made’ universal through the colonial and neo-colonial project (Smith, 1990). In that, I am not dividing between people but pointing to the gap between people that have access to the Western knowledge philosophy and practices and those that do not. The use of Western in this thesis transcends colour, race, and geography.
- **Coloniality:** This refers to the colonial project of 1492 onwards. Where the European powers physically conquered the rest of the world for the imposition of an accumulation wealth monopoly by looting and destroying native societies (Rodney, 1972). In addition, coloniality refers to the neo-liberal capital market project which continues to colonise the minds of people through education, social activities, political interventions, and economic activities (Prashad, 2012).
- **Femininity and Masculinity:** This thesis understands the femininity and masculinity as useful energies to deal with rather than the

division of sex and gender between men and women (Shiva, 1999). Within this there is no value judgement within these terms. The concepts are borrowed from the ancient philosophies from the Indian sub-continent.

- **Uneven Development:** I use the term uneven development because the mainstream concepts and interventions of development are based on capitalism. Capitalism, which creates persistent differences in levels and rates of access to resources in different sectors in a society (Smith, 1990).
- **Ancient Wisdoms:** Compared to modern knowledge which accumulates through a logical process and is delivered through a top-down practices. The Ancient wisdoms were gained and realised through internal processes. This thesis refers to wisdom as the quality of having individual experience knowledge and judgement (Vivekananda, 1989).
- **Suffering through Uncertainty and Danger:** This thesis comes from an understanding that life is uncertain and dangerous (Kleinman, 2006). These uncertainties and danger can be due to external disabling structures such as disasters, health crises, and job losses. Through this research process this thesis understands that suffering defines the human experience. Dealing with uncertainty and danger can be part of one's pedagogical journey to empowerment (Solnit, 2010).
- **Depravation vs Contentment:** There is a thin line between depravation of needs and contentment. This thesis does not condone depravation of needs which can be caused by social, political, cultural, economic and environmental factors. As argued by Sen (1999), this thesis agrees that everyone should have the right to the freedom to be developed. However, this thesis argues that contentment is an essential part of empowerment because it avoids greed, pride and jealousy that leads to suffering (Illich, 1973).

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The purpose of the thesis is to: reposition health and wellbeing back into education, and empowerment as an imperative. In doing that, this research critiques the global policies, frameworks, and practice on external interventions including the sustainable development agenda.

The aim of this PhD is to critically examine the modern philosophies and ancient wisdoms to formulate a framework that can facilitate the empowerment of women and girls. The following three objectives are established to achieve this aim:

1. To examine the mainstream knowledge systems, policies, and practices on education and empowerment.
2. To analyse philosophies and ancient wisdoms on pedagogical approaches that facilitate empowerment, which have been marginalised by the colonial and neo-colonial projects. The destruction and marginalisation of these non-mainstream pedagogical approaches is weaved into the critical examination of education.
3. To formulate a framework to facilitate the empowerment of girls and women in contrast to intervention-based educational approaches.

The framework developed in this thesis ties in with the lens of self-governance, resilience, and freedom to understand women's empowerment. This thesis addresses the phenomena of empowerment, education, and wellbeing as viewed by the women central in this research and the facilitators to empowerment.

Research Questions

Based on this aim and objectives, the following key question was developed given that women in non-western societies are subjected to development and educational interventions with an aim to empower them.

Do educational experiences empower women in non-western societies?

The following sub-questions were included to understand the link between education and empowerment based on lived experiences of women, especially from the Global South.

1. What constitutes empowerment through education? (Method: Personal account for the journey seeking empowerment)
2. What is the experience of empowerment through education? (Method: Virtual community observation and participation)
3. How does education facilitate the empowerment of girls and women in relation to health and wellbeing and the ability to make meaningful life choices? (Method: Key stakeholder engagement)

The refined research question and sub-questions to this thesis contribute to the future fields of education, empowerment, health, and wellbeing by establishing pedagogical approaches that facilitate empowerment integral to women, girls, and communities within a global context (Nussbaum, 2000; Shiva, 1999; Kleinman, 1995; Illich, 1973, 1970). Furthermore, the unquantifiable nature of lived experiences is interlinked to empowerment, learning, and wellbeing. Therefore it is through a qualitative research study and the use of narratives as data that can elicit in-depth descriptive data uncovering moral worlds that define how women experience empowerment and the concept of *becoming* (Kleinman, 2020). In this, becoming is a process of *presencing* which discusses the intimate journeying and transformative aspect of empowerment.

This qualitative research study investigates and builds on the emerging scoping review question, (the Scoping Review is in Chapter 4) “Do contemporary educational approaches facilitate empowerment?” and the narrative literature review question, (the Narrative Literature Review is in Chapter 5) “Can ancient pedagogical approaches be adapted to facilitate empowerment?”

The above questions are strongly connected to the aim and objectives of this research and have facilitated achieving them. This has been explained in detail

in the Discussion and Recommendations (In Chapter Nine) and in the Conclusion (Chapter Ten).

1.4 Methodological Framework

The lived experiences of women and their journey to empowerment is a central focus to this thesis. The aim and objectives of this research looks at the paternalistic approach to pedagogical approaches and development policies that have convoluted what empowerment means to women. Thus, this research study used a qualitative research design, a three-method process to capture the experience of empowerment through education:

1. A personal account of the journey of seeking empowerment through education.
2. A participant observation of a virtual community.
3. Key informant interviews.

The three-method process design enabled a reflective space that challenged preconceived notion of women's empowerment and biases towards marginalised and rural women formed by formal schooling. The methodological framework enables an engagement process with the key stakeholders that goes beyond in-depth qualitative interviews. In such manner the ontological and epistemological experiences by the key stakeholders were not distorted by my understanding of empowerment (Yanchar, Gantt and Clay, 2005). As the PhD progressed, the findings from the scoping review and the narrative literature review informed the study of contemporary, non-mainstream, and ancient pedagogical approaches. In addition, only a qualitative methodology could capture the experience of the phenomenon studied and the notion of "becoming." A qualitative research design allowed for the critical examination of the pedagogical approaches in formal, non-formal, and informal education. The three-method process investigates what constitutes empowerment through education including: tracing the lives of my mother and grandmother through an autoethnographic account, observing a virtual community and studying the links between education, health, and wellbeing through the journey to empowerment by the key stakeholders.

The research design borrows general concepts of qualitative methodologies such as the technique of digital ethnography and autoethnography, indigenous methodology, critical methods, phenomenology, grounded theory, critical Buddhist theory, and feminist theory. In addition, grounded theory, thematic analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, and a gonzo journalist analysis were used for the data analysis. This qualitative interpretative research design does not follow a methodological rigidity, but rather a pluralist approach to generate a complementary understanding of human phenomena. Thus, the three- method process, a systematic rigour is applied to the research design led by a question-driven approach instead of method-driven one (Yanchar, Gantt and Clay, 2005; Feyerabend, 1975). In adopting a critical method lens, this research inquiry recognises the need for a research strategy and innovation that evolves through a theoretically informed process and researcher reflexivity essential to scientific progress (Yanchar, Gantt and Clay, 2005, p.36).

The considerable disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic to travel, and in-person field research meant the project design and research questions had to be adapted. A virtual ethnographic design benefited this research in terms of reach. Furthermore, the qualitative methodologies and theories support the primary ethos of the research that calls on learning from women themselves rather than holding a paternalistic approach to understanding empowerment. The key stakeholders in this research provide rich and in-depth accounts of their experience of empowerment through non-formal, informal, and formal educational experiences. In addition, the women participants have ample life experience and work experience in representing organisations such as the United Nations (UN), international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in the empowerment of girls and women and on issues of health and wellbeing. Using digital platforms has benefited the research, allowing for a wider participant reach covering women from the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which would not have been possible if the research had remained focused on country-specific field research. The details are in the Methodology, Methods, and Caveats Chapter (Chapter Three).

1.5 Theoretical Underpinning

The theoretical underpinning to the thesis stems from the findings from the scoping review (Chapter Four) and the narrative literature review (Chapter Five) discuss empowerment as liberation and self-governance. Despite the complex social, political, cultural, and religious differences between women, commonalities emerged in women's ontological and epistemological understanding of empowerment and education (Seeberg, 2014, 2008; Shah, 2011). In addition, an important theoretical underpinning to this thesis is the emergence of care. Care as a concept is supported by pedagogical approaches that infuse a co-learning approach, mentorship, and the cultivation of friendship as relevant to a pedagogy that fosters empowerment (Freire, 1972; Illich, 1970). In contrast to Liberating pedagogy, formal mainstream education, rooted in hierarchal structures with a strict accreditation system has a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of its learners. Thus, education with a non-hierarchal structure facilitates empowerment, as shown in (Shah, 2011; Freire, 1972; Illich, 1970). Furthermore, the theoretical underpinning of this thesis argues that empowerment is manifested strongly through acts of love and the enhancement of community bonds, challenging the economic association of an empowered woman from the Western mainstream development discourse. This thesis links education and empowerment and argues that education is the perfect tool to facilitates a journey to liberation. The self-reflective process that is a central pedagogical approach is further examined regarding theoretical underpinnings of resistance, liberation and perseverance that all challenge the external application of knowledge (Illich, 1970). In this exploration of the self, critical thinking is developed through experimentation and lived experiences, which draws in the relevance of informal and non-formal education (Gandhi, 2001). In addition, and from an ancient philosophical lens, harmony, suppleness, balance, and happiness are the underpinnings to understanding health and wellbeing.

1.6 Key Findings

The key findings from the research analysis, the autoethnographic account (Chapter Six), the digital ethnography (Chapter Seven), and the key stakeholder engagements (Chapter 8) are supported and validated by the scoping review findings and the narrative literature review. As summarised in the key findings show that challenges and suffering form an important part of the empowerment and learning landscape, indicating that marginalised and rural women, and women from non-Western societies have agency.

The virtual community's participant observation findings show group dynamics change by varying power dynamics linked to funding, creating an involuntary hierarchal presence. This is largely imposed by representatives of INGOs that sit in the Global North. In this way, the research looks at presence as an important key finding and the ability to manage discomfort (Kleinman, 2017).

Intergenerational leadership amongst women from the Global South and to exercise a deep listening is interconnected with presence and authenticity, which play an important part in the experience of learning. Furthermore, the main findings from the autoethnographic account and the key stakeholder engagements show that empowerment was not a consequence of an independent educational experience, but rather, a result of co-arising educational experiences, as depicted in Buddhist thought, contrary to the Western notion of causality (Schipper, 2012, p.17).

The learning that formed the personhood of my grandmother and my mother and their capabilities to endure, survive, and flourish was largely non-formal and informal education. All the key stakeholders discuss frustrations that are particular with a rigid education system, and this same frustration of rigidity is relevant to the workplace. The key findings show a direct link between these systems and the adverse effect on the health and wellbeing of women and girls. Understanding empowerment as a multidimensional process enabling the control of one's life needs to be established within the ideal that the universe is plural, and

consequentially empowerment too will be manifested within this same plurality (Kleinman, 2020, p.170; Page and Czuba, 1999).



Figure 1 Summary of key findings from the methodological approach.

1.7 Thesis Structure

The chapters in this thesis provide a logical and coherent structure that blends in the complex and multifaceted themes of empowerment, learning, health and wellbeing from both Western and non-Western ontology and epistemology.

Chapter 1: Introduction. The introduction chapter introduces the key elements of the thesis, providing a justification for the research. The content, research questions, and key findings are also presented.

Chapter 2: Background. This chapter is written using five main headings with interlinking topics. The chapter sets out the theoretical foundation on decoloniality, non-Euro-American epistemology and a strong examination of health and wellbeing. The chapter further establishes the current state of disorientation and discusses in detail southern epistemology which is central to this thesis. The Chipko concept, resistance, wisdom and the Feminine Principle are core to theoretical foundation of this thesis. The basis for understanding Chipko as a concept and not just an ecological movement comes from the premise of the de-legitimisation of Western mainstream education and its monopoly on learning. The presumption of a deficit of knowledge legitimises one group as scientists and the other as ignorant through a complex system of accreditation.

Chapter 3: Methodology, Methods, and Caveats. The methodology chapter presents the choices of methodology, methods, and caveats that were appropriate to answer the research questions.

Chapter 4: Scoping Literature Review. This chapter is the first part of the literature review conducted. The scoping review presents the initial key findings and discusses the absence of non-mainstream, ancient wisdom, and philosophy in the current literature on education, women's empowerment, and health and wellbeing.

Chapter 5: Narrative Literature Review. The narrative literature review was conducted following on from the findings from the scoping review. This chapter looks at the wisdom and philosophies of Hindu, Buddhist, Ancient African, Ancient

Mayan, and Daoist texts and their adaptability for and relevance to mainstream education.

Chapter 6: Findings and Analysis: Personal Account. This chapter is an autoethnographic account of my life, my mother, and mothers' journey to empowerment. It has an emotive writing style similar to a family autobiography. The social, political, cultural, and religious contexts to our life stories are the grounding for this autoethnography.

Chapter 7: Digital Ethnography. This chapter presents the digital ethnographic research of a virtual community and the interactions and learning of its members. This chapter has a unique writing style compared with the other chapters as it uses a gonzo journalistic approach for analysis.

Chapter 8: Findings and Analysis: Key Stakeholder Engagements. The key stakeholder engagements report the journeys to empowerment by these key stakeholders providing a rich detailed context from a personal perspective and a professional one. The interviews are conducted in two parts allowing a rich discussion on empowerment, learning, and wellbeing.

Chapter 9: Discussion and Recommendations. The discussion and recommendations chapter combines the three-method process. The findings and analysis of all three of these stages are brought together to present a framework for the facilitation of empowerment for women and girls in a developing context.

Chapter 10: Conclusion. This chapter brings in the reflective element of this PhD and whether its pedagogical approaches have facilitated my empowerment. This chapter provides the operationalisation of the framework that is recommended for facilitators of empowerment.

2 Background: Decoloniality, Non-Euro-American Epistemology, and Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Introduction

In the Amazon rain forest, a Cofan Indian elder conversed with a “gringo” from the “world beyond the forest.” The elder’s knowledge of the rain forest surpassed that of biologists holding PhDs, who came to study there. His was a practical knowledge. He is able to find and identify more than 140 plants his people used for medicinal purposes. He knows where the peach tree grows and when its fruit attracts the brilliant blue gold macaw. In addition to his knowledge, the elder has access to a great research library. Each volume is a friend. That woman over there, she knows all there is to know about marital discord and how to ensure a household’s harmony. That old man walking beneath the trees, he talks to the God of Creation. The brothers fishing along the strand, they are the heads of a family that has built the best boats on the river for many generations. The elder’s material possessions are scant and include a machete from upriver and two cloaks from the city. His wife owns several spoons and a metal pot. Aware of the village school, run by a Jesuit priest, the visitor asks,

“Do any of your children go on to high school in the city? Do any seek a university education?”

The old man shakes his head. There is too much to be learned at home.

“It takes many years to learn to be a Cofan,” he says. His gaze drifts across the river, then returns to the gringo. “My heart aches for you,” he says.

“For me?” replies the gringo. “Why?”

“Because you are so poor. We in the forest have all we want. You gringos want for so much you do not have.”

(Henning, 2002, p.17).

The opening extract to this chapter is a dialogue between two men that epitomises the struggle of humans embroiled in the compulsive cycle of modernity. The extract touches on the pursuit of happiness, and the inability to find it. The Cofan Indian elder discusses contentment and its connection to health, oneness,

and nature. A more poignant point to this extract is the veil of ignorance that prevents us from seeing our shared humanity with each other and all other forms of life. The darker aspect of modernity is linked to endemic illness that arises from this state of separation (Rinpoche, 2008). The Cofan Indian elder, with all his wisdom and knowledge, will never fit into the rigid confines of the Westernised world view of 'educated' and 'expert.' The extract allows for reflection upon a system that is driving itself to the brink of extinction. A call for an alternative paradigm through the emergence of the feminine principle is discussed towards the end of the chapter. The chapter examines ancient to modern theoretical foundations, to dismantle the current reductionist world view. The background chapter proposes an alternative empowerment paradigm which encumbers the discussion around health and wellbeing as interlinked with concepts around nature and planetary health. Thus, through nature we understand that it too is a manifestation of *Prakriti* – the feminine principle, a living force through which all life arises (M, 2017; Shiva, 1999).

This chapter establishes a theoretical, conceptual and practical background to this thesis by critically examining the colonial roots to modern empowerment and the development discourse, arguing that girls and women in most marginalised and rural communities are indeed uncolonized, retaining their independence, and empowerment. The chapter provides an overview of the disenfranchisement between empowerment and education from a health and wellbeing context by examining the experiences of the current Covid-19 global pandemic. Following on from this, the chapter establishes the theoretical underpinnings of decoloniality and Southern epistemologies that ground this thesis and its discussion around health and wellbeing, education, and empowerment. There are five broad headings that provide orientation and a grounding to this thesis; non-Euro-American epistemologies and healthy, the great disorientation, decoloniality as a prominent theme woven throughout the discussion, the failure of the current pedagogical and health approaches in the mainstream and the theoretical foundation from ancient to modern. The chapter concludes by examining the concept of Chipko from India as an introduction to an alternative empowerment and wellbeing paradigm.

2.2 Non-Euro-American Epistemology and Health

Ancient epistemologies can almost be seen like flowing strands of braided hair, collecting from a single consciousness of ancient generations. As Ryser (1997, p.1) argues, the separation between the personal self and the collective self is only an illusion, which is camouflaged by a physical separateness: “The personal self is to the collective self as the upstream waters are to the full rivers below.” Similarly, Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring* (1962), also argues, people and nature are intimately connected. Studies from hospitals in Sweden have shown that art and nature are like ‘medicine to the soul,’ helping patients recover better (Karolinska, 2015). ‘Oneness’ and ‘balance’ within a health context are some of the core philosophical underpinning concepts of this background chapter and form the basis of the theoretical framework.

For the purposes of this thesis, the word indigenous means the epistemologies developed through generational and geographical traditions that are scientifically founded on observation and experience by a specific society and people (Wright and Jayawickrama, 2020; Ferreira and Lang 2005). The wisdom born from ancient indigenous civilizations forms the selection of texts reviewed in this narrative review. What can perhaps be identified early on, when critically analysing ancient epistemologies, is the taught relationship between the highly rationalised and methodological approach that distinguishes modern science and the ancient philosophies and spiritual literature that delves deep into the internal (Chalmers, 2013). There is cohesion in terms of the internal application of empowerment and wellbeing from an ancient epistemological perspective (Ngomane, 2019; M, 2012; Rinpoche, 2008). *Ishavasya, Upanishad* from the Hindu Vedic spiritual literature, Shloka 1, is emphatic in its teachings of joy, the joy that comes from the ability of letting go. This virtue of non-attachment is concerned with external attachments that cause suffering and bondage. In this spiritual awakening, all that lies in us is sufficient in the pursuit wellbeing (M, 2012). The stresses of modern life are all external inflictions and attachment to material gains as described in the dramatic novels published by the British author J.G. Ballard (1930 – 2009). The author wrote eccentrically about the decomposition of human behaviour and the human struggle

to cope with wealth, work, and dissatisfaction. Although fictional, there lurks a dark truth concerning the coping mechanisms employed to handle modern life's fast pace. From an ancient wisdom lens, introspection and the knowledge of self happens in solitude (Khantipālo, 1997). The British Health and Safety (HSE) report identifies a 30% increase in work-related stress between 1990 and 1995. In 2009, the HSE estimated that yearly 13.3 million working days were lost due to stress (Jackson, 2014). From a health perspective, this acceleration of lifestyle, unbalances the neuro-endocrine system, is linked to hypertension, heart disease, and depression, largely affecting the Western population (Sapolsky, 2004).

Our bodies are the recipients of the external pressures of modern life, which cause chronic stress. The allostatic load— 'wear and tear on the body,' speaks to our brain, which speaks to our body through neurotransmitters (NTs). The exhaustion on our wellbeing is due to the rupture between the internal oneness and the confused notion of our true nature (Tiesler, 2017). The dependency on external gratification, sensory experience, has confused our understanding of true 'happiness.' The institutionalisation that governs the education and health system of modern Western culture has compartmentalised learning and health (Illich, 1978). Education is mostly obtainable in a class room and health has become so specialised that it too is unobtainable unless prescribed by a specialist (Illich, 1970). This same notion of compartmentalisation, or divide, is the foundation for accreditation, and the notion of being 'self-made' (Ngomane, 2019). It is how the education system assesses its students through individual examination, the cutting of knowledge, the disempowerment of community wellbeing, and the pursuit for external gratification.

This section looks at health in relation to 'balance,' which places sickness as the manifestation of imbalance. This permits a holistic interpretation of health and wellbeing, treating both the spirit and body as one according to a more medico-religious approach (Ferreira and Lang, 2005). From an empowerment lens, ancient societies were emersed in healing practices that blended all aspects of their culture, from food to science to rituals (Huffpost, 2017). For example, Mayan *shamans* acted as intermediaries between the spiritual and the physical realms, referred to

as *ah-men*, the 'disease throwers' (BAUS, 2020). Similarly, in Eastern philosophy, health is immersed in the notion of balance of the three *doshas* (substances): *vata* (air), *pitta* (fire), and *kapha* (water). The three elements represent the regulation of a person's physiological, psychological and spiritual aspect (Gupta, 2016). *Vata*, encompasses everything that is the inhalation and exhalation, all the senses, and movements, the element of fire; *pita*, governs the digestions, bodily excretion, warmth, circulation, energy, intelligence, and ability. *Kapha* represents the bodily toxins, glands, lubrication, the digestive tract, waste material, the bliss of the spirit and mind. Health is defined as: *sama-dosha sam-agnishcha Sama-dhatu-mala-kriya Prasann atma-indriva-manah Swathya-ity-abhidiyate* (If you sleep well, if you eat well, if your stools are clear and if you do not hate anyone, you are healthy) (Susruta Samhita, *Ayurvedic Textbook of Medicine and Surgery*, 6th century BC). From these ancient notions of health, there comes a sense of a full and rich understanding of humanity in an unrestricted form. Health from a Western perspective, is defined by the WHO as: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 2020). The void of any spiritual notion within this definition is glaringly obvious, but the practical implementation of health within a Western context suffers greatly beyond this. Being healthy is a rare and cumbersome task by this definition that flows contrary to the impermanent, fast-paced throwaway culture surrounding us. Furthermore, to be healthy is subject to external factors like social wellbeing. This becomes problematic as health is removed from ones' control.

Understanding food as medicine is a lost concept in The Standard American Diet (SAD). The SAD in its most basic form, is like poison, leading to chronic inflammation that prompts an imbalance in our bodies (Korn, 2016). Our consumption and understanding of food in Britain is fuelling conditions such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes (Donnelly, 2019). Statistics from 2018 show that 63% of adults in England were overweight or obese (NHS, 2020). Issues such as our relationship with diet are intrinsically connected to our overall health as a society. Similarly, the removal of food as medicine and food as a 'fancy' are symptoms of a larger problem within the institutionalisation of education that has severed

community knowledge. The modern education system highlights some of the more perverse consequences to the exclusion of traditional knowledge systems concerning health. From an indigenous peoples' perspective, refined foods, white flours, soft drinks pertain to the introduction of 'colonial' food that disturbs the metabolic balance (Ferreira and Lang, 2005). From an empowerment perspective, Gandhi (1861 – 1948), in his autobiography, conducts continuous food experiments. His life was an experiment, which in short could be understood as an unrestricted educational experience (Gandhi, 2001). A common thread throughout the empowerment discourse is the ability to make meaningful choices (Blaak, Estacio, 2013; Openjuru and Zeelen, 2013; Shah, 2011). To facilitate empowerment through education, learning ought to be unrestricted, an integral part of our daily lives, and reflected in our everyday choices like that of food. Studies have shown that the ancient Maya people's eating habits were superfoods like cacao and chia seeds; they owned pets and had strong family kinships, indicating a sophisticated understanding of health (Huffpost, 2017). Pre-colonial diet for the indigenous peoples of Mexico, before the 16th century did not consist of fried, foods or wheat (Joe and Young, 1994). Traditional foods and indigenous epistemologies of ethnomedicine, ethnobotany, and medicinal plants have been discarded and ostracised by colonial pre-eminence, which remains prevalent in modern Western culture and biomedical approaches (Ferreira and Lang, 2005). Secondly, the gap in knowledge regarding health and education requires a shift in direction to include indigenous knowledge in future research (Michel, Caceres and Mahady, 2016). The traditional healing practices of the Q'eqchi Maya women of Livingston Guatemala use ethnomedicines for all aspects of their reproductive cycles. They showed that *Pieraceae* was the most common family plant used for remedies. Q'eqchi women of Belize also used to treat mental health conditions.

Interestingly, up to 80% of US women suffer from somatic symptoms and premenstrual mood changes, compared with a low of 28% prevalence among Maya women in Yucatán. Similar comparisons have been made regarding the menopause, suggesting the health benefits of the daily use of plant-based medicines, traditional foods and lifestyle as effective (Michel, Caceres and Mahady, 2016, p.308).

Authentic nutrition and the fusion of a holistic healing approach allows a community to regain control over its health. The use of the culinary arts, medicinal plants, detoxification to restore the metabolic balance, the cleansing of the physical, spiritual and psychological restores balance (Ferreira and Lang, 2005).

Modern science is still in its infancy compared with ancient traditional knowledge systems, yet its physicalist approach cannot explain any phenomena that operate in the first-person data of consciousness (Chalmers, 2013). This renders our full understanding incomplete, regarding subjective experiences, and physical process. Arguing for a nonreductive approach in understanding phenomena requires an inclusive and multifaceted understanding with elements that can complement one another (Wright and Jayawickrama, 2020). The invisible links with the emotional, intuitive, spiritual and the physical have surfaced as an important discovery in modern times with the ‘second brain’ discovery. When you feel in your ‘gut,’ also known as the enteric nervous system, an undetected communication that runs through over 100 million nerves and chemicals allows physiological stress to be felt (Korn, 2016).

Optimal health, wellbeing, empowerment, and education cannot be divorced from social, emotional and spiritual ties which bind us together (Ngomane, 2019). From an indigenous perspective, our family also includes other animals, plants and all that make part of our world and the universe (Rinpoche, 2008; Ryser, 1997). The ancient teachings of Buddhist philosophy are enthused within the meaning of life; they are intricate and delicate teachings of harmony and balance. To be truly human is to rid oneself of Samsara. In this, the ultimate aim of ancient technologies, such as meditation, the practice of *dharma*, is to live with purpose – bringing continual happiness to every living thing. Through the Buddhist lens, we are all in a cycle of rebirth and death that ceases suffering for all (Rinpoche, 2008). The practical implementation of these ancient epistemologies is displayed in people’s relationships with consumption. A plethora of ancient traditions show a sustainable way of life, away from endless Western consumerism and its throwaway culture.

2.3 The Great Disorientation of the Current World

With the rise and expansion of modern science we are at an era of incredible technological advancement. World War II that gave rise to the creation of the United Nations and since 1945 the world has only experienced 26 days of peace. An indicator that despite our sophisticated mechanisms and the current information age, we are embroiled in a great disorientation (Prashad, 2022). There are many contributing factors which go beyond the flagrant loss of life and divisions that pepper our world due to armed conflict. The nature of external violence we have grown so accustomed to witness is a representation of a deeper internal conflict within ourselves (Fanon, 1961). The argument of equality falls on deaf ears when the multinationals like BAE Systems continue to sell arms and profiteer over the massacres of the *non-equals*. For example, in the rich Copperbelt region of Zambia there lies a deep-seated injustice of inequality that is responsible for 60 percent of the children in the Copperbelt region to be illiterate (Prashad, 2022). It is these examples of injustice that support the argument made about an era of disorientation due to the disenfranchisement of humans with each other and nature. The violence of our societies are a manifestation of our own inability to be peaceful, and in that, healthy and balanced (Krishnamurti, 2000).

Wealth as a concept has been stripped down to a universal understanding of generating surpluses and profit. As argued by Shiva (1999), the development discourse is rather a maldevelopment. The Human Development Report (2020) addresses a state of imbalance from an ecological and social perspective and discusses the novel coronavirus that has gripped world attention as a fork in the road for greater collective consciousness. It adopts a colourful yet contradictory lexicon using words like 'flourishing,' 'balance,' and 'empowerment.' Still, it fails to deviate from economic growth as imperative for developing countries. The report is contradictory, in that it solely argues for raising income, whilst still advocating for material resources within planetary boundaries (2020, p.20). Once again, human development is bound by the income component to which basic capabilities such as living a healthy life and education can only be expanded. Sen's (1999) *Development as Freedom* is interwoven in the report's analysis. Sen (1999, p.4) argues that

development ought to be seen as the process of expanding ‘real freedoms’ that people enjoy. The adoption of this premise rearranges the dominant agenda that narrowly constructs development with the growth of gross national product (GNP), income, industrialisation, technological advancement, and social modernisation. Development as freedom understands traditional economics as a means of expansion to these real and enjoyed freedoms. The narrow parameter of the patriarchal capitalist model confines freedoms into choices within an economic model, setting the relationship of consumer and producer as a pre-requisite for the system’s survival (Illich, 1973).

Bondage is an underlining thread that addresses the dependence on consumerism. From an ancient wisdom perspective, freedom and liberation are the ultimate purposes (Radharkrishnan, 1963). The story of Nachiketa, from the *Katha Upanishad*, is part of the *Yajur Veda*, the ancient spiritual and philosophical Hindu texts. This story unravels a young boy’s quest to find out what happens when a person attains spiritual freedom. Spiritual freedom is understood as being free from all conditionings and surroundings (M, 2017). There is a wisdom woven into the social fabrics of indigenous, tribal, and rural communities, about the ‘*being*’ aspect of humanity (Vivekananda, 1989). To strike a balanced tone and not infer a romanticisation of traditional cultures, this thesis does not paint all traditional cultures as utopias (Nussbaum, 1997), but rather, it is about resurfacing the intelligence that unites (Zulu, 2018).

The exclusion of principles like oneness, is the basis for ignorance and arrogance by a system that claims human development in the Anthropogenic epoch – with man at the centre of the world. The Human Development Report (2020) describes the planet as a ‘resource’ that ought to be used with caution but fails to implement an analytical framework of oneness and interconnectedness that may transform the colonialist legacy within global development. To position humanity as wagers of war against nature is an argument that deflects attention from the international partners and users of the Human Development Report. Similarly, it presents an agenda to discuss the individual behaviour, incentives and regulations to prompt action based on values (UNDP, 2020). The report introduces top-down

approaches that fail to harness the empowerment and self-sufficiency of marginalised and rural communities living uncolonized and in balance. Convivial societies retain an ability to produce their own knowledge. The deprivation of natural competence caused by non-convivial tools is the ideal backdrop for a society run by a radical monopoly, that is, the forced consumption of commodities of service (Illich, 1973). Perhaps what is at the centre of modern human development is the unsatiable nature of greed; “Because of our greed, we do not know how to be satisfied even when we attain our desire of the moment. The more desires we have, the more attached to them we become, in a vicious circle” (Niwano, 1989). lists top banks that have financed 3.8 trillion dollars for coal, oil, and gas firms despite the Paris climate deal in 2015. This is the hypocrisy within the global market system and the neoliberalism of capitalism that allows for the unlimited expansion of global greed whilst framing *humanity* as the wagers of war on the planet.

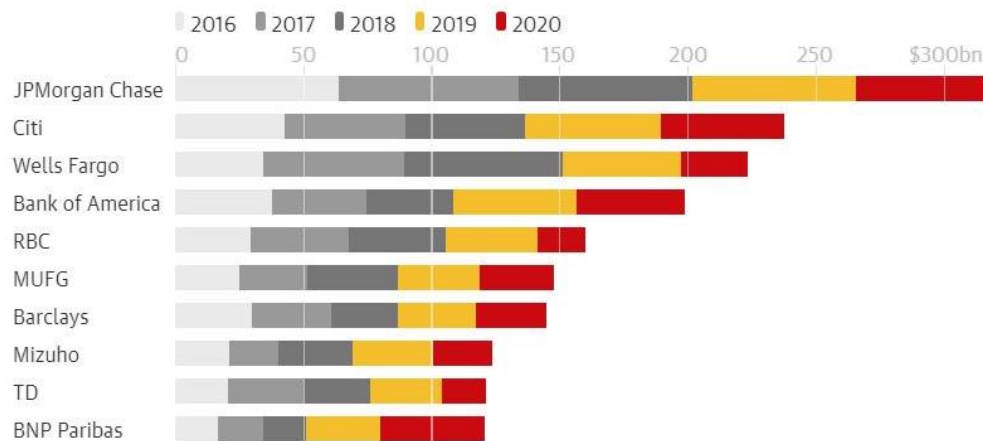


Figure 2 Banks financing fossil fuel projects between 2016 and 2020 (The Guardian, 2021).

The current green washing of international financial institutions, governments, and multinationals facilitate corporations to finance programmes in the name of development are the sponsors of the Sustainable Development Goals

(2030). International partnerships based on economic gain find themselves relatively free from major scrutiny whilst maintaining a sustainable image regardless of their part in destroying the planet and human health. Development is not a question of the expansion of valued freedoms but rather the expansion of economic greed in the name of freedom (Shiva, 1999). In this false sense of perceptions, the Bible discusses the polemic in having a dual purpose, as mentioned in Luke (16:13), “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

The multi-dysfunctionality of the development discourse that works to impose universal standards has tainted the diversity of knowledge and human flourishing born from a place of empowerment and not of equality (Kleinman, 1995; Vivekananda, 1989). The perversion of modernity and its unquenchable thirst for development is described by Illich (1973, p.18) as the confusion between discerning what is fit for purpose with metrics. The universal measuring rod employed globally by the Western notion of growth has shaped our demands and manipulated our own logic. Similarly, the invention of education has planted a monopoly over learning. Those who dare to learn outside the education system are discarded as ‘uneducated,’ discriminated against and stigmatised (Illich, 1973, 1970). This same application of a universal measurement is seen in modern Western healthcare and the illegality imposed by governing bodies on people who wish to heal one another (Illich, 1973). Thus, it is only through the instruction and world view of teachers and medical experts we obtain health and education. All of which are made credible through tools that are ever more alienated to the masses because of the bureaucratic systems of knowledge stock, obtainable only by a few. Illich (1973, p.11) argues:

Society can be destroyed when further growth of mass production renders the milieu hostile, when it extinguishes the free use of the natural abilities of society’s members, when it isolates people from each other and locks them into a man-made shell, when it undermines the texture of community by promoting extreme social polarisation and splintering specialisation, or when cancerous acceleration enforces social change at a rate that rules out legal,

cultural, and political precedents as formal guidelines to present behaviours. Corporate endeavours which thus threaten society cannot be tolerated.

From a convivial lens, development is the facilitation of tools that expand people's ability to shape and enrich their environment according to their vision (Illich, 1973, p.11). Modern tools that pass the second watershed frustrate the many and represent status for the few. 'Liberating austerity' is further argued by Illich (1973, p.14) as a marker of people's liberation of the capitalist control of industrial production.

The ability for humans to exercise their humanness and aptitude in all domains of life is, in essence, empowerment. To control tools that mark human expression through an integrated system of human dependability based on care is the return to an uncolonized state of mind. The analogy of Adam and Eve's banishment from the garden of Eden in Genesis (3:17-23) provides an interesting backdrop that examines the feminine principle further. God casts judgement on Adam and Eve because of their disobedience. In what on the surface appears to be a punishment, God subjects Eve to pain in childbirth and a state of imbalance between her and her husband. Adam is cursed to work the land through hard work. The unravelling of both judgements through a critical examination reflects profound teaching of divinity immersed in the feminine principle (M, 2017). This biblical portion can be interpreted as 'liberating austerity' to which we understand the essence of creation through the dialectical play that is the nature of everything (Kinsley, 1978; Illich, 1973). From a pedagogical lens, humanity represented in Adam and Eve emerges from a state of unknown. The judgement is the physical embodiment of the feminine principle. The depth of this teaching paves the learning that humanity must take to understand the True Self, the universal consciousness that resides in and through us (M, 2012). God speaks to himself as 'us,' referring to the plurality of their divinity: "The [hu]man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil" (Genesis, 3:22). Thus, it is through pain that life abounds. The feminine must be in perfect balance with its masculine energy, releasing all oppression from a state of imbalance depicted in the struggle between

wife and husband, and through this judgement, Adam and Eve learn about the workings of humanity in its most divine state.

Equality as a modern concept follows the premise of externality that dominates modern science and biomedicine. The separation of health and religion, rituals, and theology, is the bases of a system built on the assumption that the five senses alone define human existence and experience (Kleinman, 1995). Power structures uncovered through feminist and Marxist lenses reveal the disabling nature of market driven economies for those who operate within these systems; hence, no longer should empowerment be used as a tool for those that operate beyond these margins (Shiva, 1999).

Capitalist societies breed dependency, eroding the intuitive learning of its members; this is best amplified by the approach to empowerment of marginalised and rural women (Illich, 1973, Rodney, 1972). Over the past decade the polysemic nature of 'women's empowerment' has been used by international development organisations to accelerate the agenda for women's empowerment from 'developing' countries. The empowerment agenda conceals itself as a tool to roll out policy initiatives and development programmes in the name of poverty reduction, formal political participation, and education schemes for as many people as possible (Eyben and Napier-Moore, 2009). In a masquerade of words dressed in ambiguity, international actors have pushed the agenda for women's empowerment as a cornerstone of the sustainable goals (SDGs) for 2030 (Struckmann, 2018). The United Nations (UN) defines empowerment as:

The process of enabling people to increase control over their lives, to gain control over the factors and decisions that shape their lives, to increase their resources and qualities, and to build capacities to gain access, partners, networks, a voice, in order to gain control (United Nations, 2015).

This working definition is problematic at best as it conjures the idea that external agencies are needed as enablers of empowerment (Cornwall, 2007). Furthermore, the process of gaining greater control of one's own life rests on the internal ability to exert 'self-discipline.' It is an inner mastery of oneself from a deep understanding

of 'who am I, really' (Vasudev, 2016; M, 2012; Kabat-Zin, 2003; Krishnamurti, 1978; Buddha, c. 563/480-c. 483/400 BCE). The definition lacks any acknowledgement of the spiritual and philosophical tones to self-awareness and rests mainly on an external visualisation of women's participation in public life (Eyben and Napier-Moore, 2009). The politicisation of empowerment has assigned this benevolent 'buzzword' to social development groups who are poor, disabled, female, rural, marginalised, indigenous people predominantly from the Global South (United Nations, 2015). The critique to this definition is found in the dominant 'Western' binary thinking that imposes a judgement by default through a positivist objective measurement (Kleinman, 1995). It implies a universal standard between developed, developing, empowered, and disempowered, civilised, and barbaric, educated, and uneducated, and so the list goes on (Kleinman, 1995). In establishing a current state of disorientation empowerment cannot be further defined by the same patriarchal institutions that suppress women, rather grounded theory becomes essential to ensure that theory is generated from the key stakeholders from this research (Sbaraini et al., 2011). In addition, the theoretical framework of this thesis is largely influenced by feminist philosophy and in this, a grounded theory approach lends itself to feminist research.

The evolving nature of 'becoming' which is central to this thesis is captured through the narratives told by the key stakeholders and is supported by grounded theory. Grounded theory as such, allows for a creative process which help answer those difficult questions of what is empowerment from the lived experience of women? (Keddy, et al., 1996).

2.4 Recolonisation and Decolonisation

A well-worn yet profound quote by Desmond Tutu, a renowned South African Anglican cleric and theologian, succinctly describes the pillage of the colonies and annihilation of ancient wisdom in the name of salvation; "When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible, and we had the land. They said, 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible, and they had the land." 'Land' – *matter, Mother Earth*, is not a resource for extraction but

matter and life – *prana* and *rayih*: according to Indian cosmology, it represents the creation that exists in the universe (M, 2017). The forced missionary-driven approaches to compassion trampled over local and traditionally rich methods in the Global South. Halting the continuation of communities to develop their own humanitarian, ecological, educational, and health approaches (Rodney, 1972). Trampling over local community approaches began with the expansive iron-fist of the *white saviour* as they travelled in their ships to the coastlines of new worlds. Quickly, the tides changed and after the destruction of their traditional knowledge systems the colonial tactics took on an administrative approach entangling these communities into perpetual development programmes and debt which dictated what and how modern societies ought to look (Prashad, 2022, Rodney, 1972).

Luxemburg (1913) argues that the global expansion of a Westernised capitalist economic model was significantly accelerated by European imperialism. From the inception of global capitalism, therefore, the European colonial expansion created a fragmented development landscape rife with unequal development, through its appropriation of power and wealth from newly introduced capitalist states into a commodity economy, and international loans from infrastructure projects (Morton, 2018). The critique of the imperialist system and its successive recreation through political and international agendas highlights Marxist theory's contribution to pedagogy (Luxemburg, 1913). As argued by Freire (1972), the awakening through pedagogy and reclaiming humanity from the dehumanisation of oppression and the oppressor occurs through a responsibility for understanding the system and consequently understanding oneself within the workings of it to bring about change and empowerment:

The oppressed, having internalised the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of [hu]man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion (Freire, 1972, p.29).

Luxemburg (1913) further argues that the permanent occupation of the colonies by colonial powers created the accumulation and dispossession of non-capitalist societies, destroying the local natural economy necessary to the production of surplus and value (Morton, 2018; Shiva, 1999). Highlighting an oversight to Marx's materialist analysis in *Das Kapital*, Marxism reduces history and society to economics (Peterson, 2018). The reductionist lens applied by any discipline ignores the multidimensional power of non-Western cultures, their wisdom and knowledge principled in health and wellbeing that encapsulates spirituality, courage, and strength—all the intricacies that make humans into 'beings.'

The romanticisation of philanthropy and development aid for the poor vulnerable third world people echo a colonial imperialism that saw 60 million people die of famine during the British Rule in India and the pillage of \$45 trillion during the colonial period (Swaraj, 2021). The response of marginalised and rural communities in times of suffering is the raw display of empowerment. The Tebhaga movement from the Indian famine saw the women in Bengal rise united in saying "*Jan Debu, Dhan Debu Na*" (We will give our lives, but will not give our rice) (Swaraj, 2021, p.3).

The SDG, No. 2, "Zero Hunger" addresses the symptoms inflicted on marginalised and rural communities by capitalist neoliberalism yet avoids the central issue of food sovereignty and self-reliance. This leaves the relief of hunger open to the monopoly of global corporations driven by profit causing deprivation and disregarding health and nutrition. The prioritisation of an agenda shaped by dependency will naturally disregard traditional knowledge acquired through experience (Illich, 1973). Similarly, the excess of extreme wealth is unaddressed and reframed as SDG, No. 1, "Ending extreme poverty," leaving the floodgates open to the continuation of extractive dominance over nature (Ortiz Montemayor, 2018; Illich, 1973). "Earth provides enough to satisfy every [hu]man's needs, but not every man's greed" Mahatma Gandhi (1869 – 1944). The inflated egos of Western thinkers prevent a system that would bring balance through a shared learning and equal partnership founded on respect (Wright and Jayawickrama, 2020). Equality

that is not principled on imposing universal standards, but on the equal value of life, as argued by Butler (2020). An ancient Hindu understanding of equality is that it is not an external characteristic but found in the self – *atman* – that is concealed in every human, the *purusha* – *the spirit*. The Katha Upanishad further argues that this kind of equality that is the ‘best’ does not have race, creed, or religion (M, 2017).

From a modern equality lens, a zero-hunger objective offers a measurable goal. Again, equality is used as a quota that perpetuates the Western capitalist cycle of consumer and producer, negating a sustainable solution of food sovereignty principled on health and wellbeing. The indigenous communities in the Pacific islands, Southeast Asia, and Mexico are denied their right to grow their own food using permaculture (Ortiz Montemayor, 2018). Rethinking empowerment from a non-mainstream perspective provides a new emerging understanding of the phenomena grounded in health and wellbeing. The health and wellbeing aspect of empowerment is manifested in self-reliance, sovereignty, and self-governance. These are core values and principles of ancient wisdom that teach the virtue of non-attachment (Vivekananda, 1989).

Food sovereignty as understood by indigenous peoples are subjected to food injustice (like the *Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians*). For example, the encroachment from a paper mill and steel mill in Canada, and from a sewage and tannery site in the United States are all challenges they have fought against to uphold their court-affirmed [treaty] right to harvest plants and animals. From an equality perspective, delivering bags of rice to the community would solve the issue of hunger. From their empowerment lens, this is not about hunger but a direct account of their ‘being’ and what wild rice from their waters means to them (Whyte, 2017). Empowerment at the local level is displayed in the continuous struggle for freedom and independence of systems which threaten to enslave. The fight between colonialism and self-reliance can be traced through history (Gandhi, 2001). After the newly emergent Indian nation, economic self-reliance, self-help, and food security became the cornerstone for India’s freedom. Up until the introduction of the Green Revolution and the intrusion of corporate-driven globalisation, Indian policy was focused on the regeneration of agriculture and the

repair of broken nutrient and water cycles from the extractive agriculture of British colonialism.

Issues around equity and social justice are central to feminist research which plays a significant role in the reconceptualization of qualitative research (Canella and Manuelito, 2008). In addition, decolonial forms of thought remain in the margins of society and in social science research. Indigenous theory and indigenous worldviews focus on relationships and the co-creation of knowledge, bringing a respectful and inclusive research portrayal of the experiential and embodiment of being in storying as a research method (Kovach, 2018, pp.223–227). The research as such needs to be informed by indigenous theory and methodology to capture the empowerment, resistance of the everyday (Scott,1985). From the indigenous perspectives, knowledge is experience based on storying. The narratives of the key stakeholders propose a theoretical engagement process grounded in presence (Kleinman, 2020).

The veil of ignorance that engulfs the developed world and its elite perpetuates the notion it has nothing to learn from other humans, who are not captive to the mechanics of progression. In the Vedic prayer, '*mrityor ma amritam gamaya,*' this is to understand the concept of knowledge and ignorance, which is, 'the one who worships ignorance enters into greater darkness, and the one who worships knowledge enters into even greater darkness;' to understand ignorance is to be free from it (M, 2012). Colonialism sits at the heart of the attempted erosion of ancient wisdom. The net cast to obliterate indigenous practices is not merely a thing of the past. The colonial mentality remains active among the health and education sectors of modern society, governed by international bodies that practice a one size fits all approach to intricately complex systems of learning and healing (Ferreira and Lang, 2005). The cultural integrity of ancient societies and indigenous practices continue to be subjugated to colonial looting, a rupture of culture, which is in constant change (Adichie, 2015). However, this is not an argument to position ancient societies as all good. Rather, it is about the disruption and prevention of the natural evolutionary process of these societies and knowledge systems (Rodney, 1972). The lingering remnants of the colonial projects lie in the assumption of

unprofessionalism regarding the ‘traditional,’ commonly referred to as ‘alternative,’ that directly attacks the legitimacy of ancient practices. Claiming back a framework grounded on empowerment may equate to the decolonisation of health and education. Allowing village health workers and traditional practices to be part of the health practice landscape marries the internal and external (Wright and Jayawickrama, 2020).

The thinkers of the Enlightenment era hailed European culture and civilisation to be the forefront of progress. Immanuel Kant identified the movement from barbarism towards civilisation as progress. From an African lens, in the ChiBemba and other Zambian languages, freedom is understood as largely the antithesis of slavery. The end to colonialism to some Zambians marks the end of slavery, marking independence. *Ubutungwa* in ChiBemba language, derived from *Ubuntu*, is intertwined with the status of being fully human (Siame, 2000). In ‘Two Concepts of Liberty,’ Berlin (1958) distinguishes ‘negative freedom’ and ‘positive freedom.’ According to Berlin (1958), those subjugated to the yoke of slavery – colonialism, were demanding ‘status and recognition,’ entirely unrelated to individual liberty. As argued by Siame (2000), philosopher Berlin (1958) viewed the state, country, and individuals as all different entities. From an African context, ‘a free person is a citizen of a free country;’ one cannot award a country independence and not infer the same liberty for its people (Siame, 2000, p.56). This view resonates with the revolutionary thinking of Fidel Castro (1926 – 2016). Who fought to free Cuba from complete colonial rule, which was in stark contrast to its neighbouring Latin American nation’s theoretical independence that was still held on puppet strings by Washington (Castro and Ramonet, 2009). Politics aside, an empowered person can halt the oppression of the oppressed (Freire, 1972). This is illustrated in the notable non-violent salt march by Mahatma Gandhi and the ‘I have a dream speech’ by Martin Luther King, Jr (Ngomane, 2019). In this, the theory of decoloniality is interwoven through the remaining chapters and is prominent in the Methodological framework of this research (Chapter 3).

2.5 The Failure of Pedagogical and Health Approaches in the Mainstream

This section calls for a re-establishment of education within a health and wellbeing context. When critically analysing empowerment through education, a reoccurring question is, 'What is the purpose of education? From the scoping review findings (Chapter 4), education holds conflicting purposes (Bush, 2000). From an Upanishadic philosophical lens, education's purpose is not found in intellectual knowledge that leads to greater darkness - meaning a deeper state of ignorance and arrogance (M, 2012). This is the pedagogy of self-inquiry, understood as *spaces* that facilitate introspection, discussed in detail in the scoping review findings and narrative literature review (Chapters 4 and 5).

The current education crisis reported by the UN estimates 617 million children and adolescents as lacking a minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics (United Nations, 2019b, p.30). It is a glimpse of mainstream education's failings. Beyond mathematics and literacy, there is a deprivation of a fundamental pedagogy that is being stripped away by the institutionalisation of education (Illich, 1970). Against this backdrop, there remains an urgent imperative to fuse wisdom back into education (Jeste and Lee, 2019). The word '*Upanishad*' can perhaps be seen played out into three meanings; 'upa' – 'to move nearer to the truth' 'ni' – to sit in a position that allows for a humble disposition of learning, and 'shad' – to quiet the mind so to listen (M, 2012).

The prioritisation of grade attainment can obscure the link between formal mainstream education and health. Our obsessive relationship with grades is a relatively new phenomenon that became widespread in the 1940s. Prior to that, Harvard and other 18th and 19th-century universities issued medals to communicate distinction amongst students (Schinske and Tanner, 2014). In addition to the development of grades, the success of education is largely marked through a quantitative lens. This is largely seen with school enrolment figures (UNESCO, 2020; Ishida, 2010; Frankema, 2008; Deininger, 2003; Hannum, 2003). The question is,

what does this tell us about learning, wellbeing and empowerment? But more specifically, what personal development is there beyond schools and jobs?

2.5.1 Fragmentation of Education

The parasitic approach to citizenship in developed industrial societies draws strong parallels to an education system that commands obedience, passive learning, and repetitive memorising (Illich, 1970). The impetuous nature of a person brings forth dynamism, creativity, and disruption. Individuals make imprints through their craftsmanship, but this has been implicitly discouraged first through the sterile classroom settings and secondly because of the purpose of education (Sennett, 2008). In this vein of postcolonial theory, the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2000) offers an important critique in the Enlightenment philosophy that assumes human as an abstract figure. Chakrabarty (2000) argues that it is important to engage critically in postcolonial thought to welcome and recognise the diversity of human experience and the different conditions of *being*. The unprecedented disruption to global mainstream education due to the Covid-19 pandemic has re-engaged many parents and guardians worldwide in their children's education. This experience has led parents to see the shortcomings of mainstream education and its non-conducive learning environment (Eggleston and Fields, 2021; Hattenstone and Eleanor, 2021). Online learning added a barrier to an already weak system of in-person teaching, designed to prepare for jobs that substitutes individual development (Britannica, 2022), causing the system to fail further. There are vital questions missing from the discussion of education in times of Covid-19. Whilst the data point to aspects of mainstream education that safeguard children, like access to food, interaction, and play. The wider political, social, and cultural phenomena of the rise of neoliberalism have depleted rich home learning environments. As shown in Figure 3, the school closure data illustrate that the longer children were away from school, the lower The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reading score (The Economist, 2021).

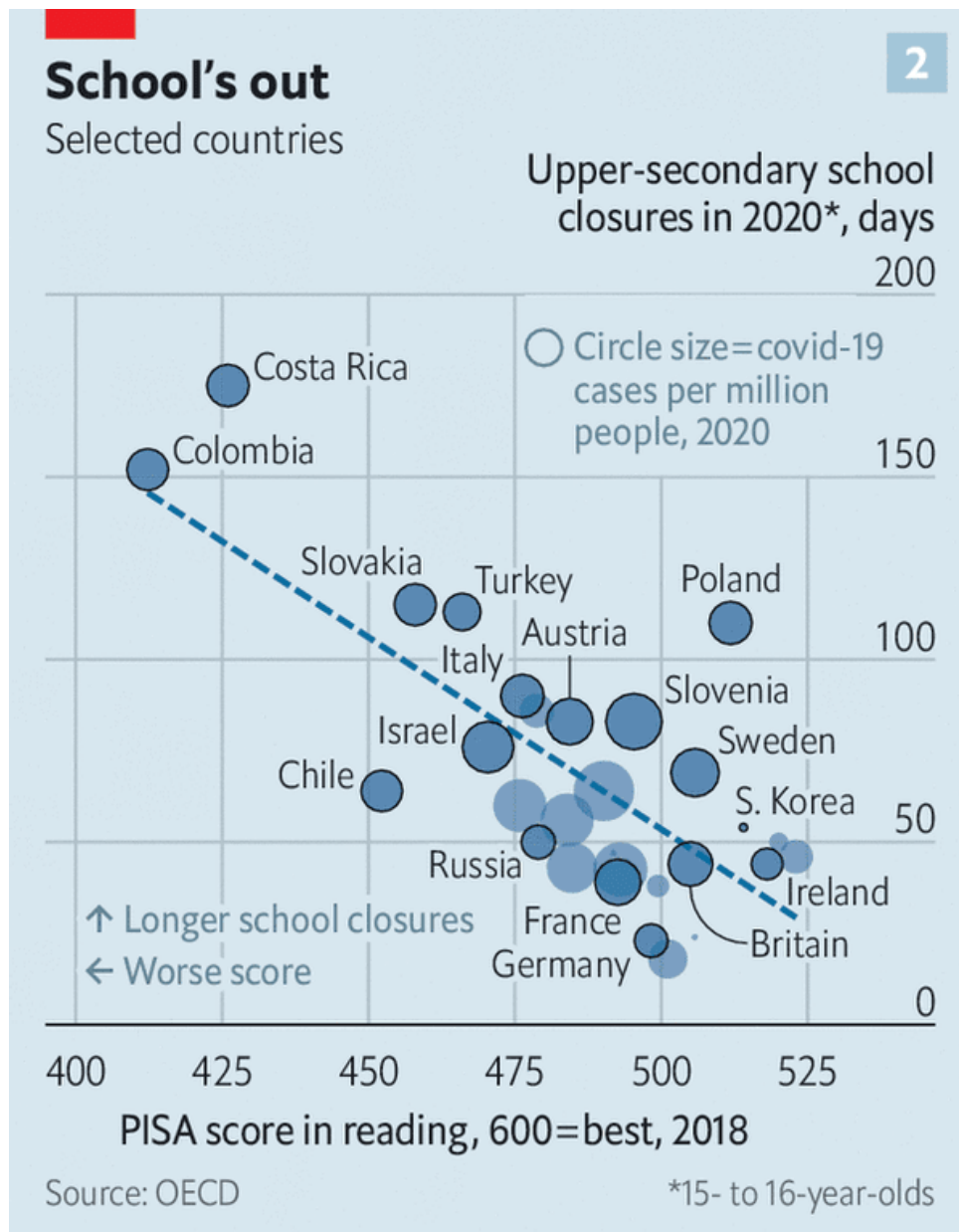


Figure 3 School closure and depletion of literacy (Source: OECD, 2020).

This background chapter argues that the data in figure 4 serves as a broader outline of the inaccessibility of knowledge and wisdom in modern Westernised communities. Whilst the data can be narrowly interpreted as showing 'schooling' as intrinsically good, it is argued that the 'good' is measured by a metric of employability prospects. The wider discussion on education and the two faces of education, as argued by Bush (2000), signal an endemic ability to critique the institution, but place the onus on the learner. In pushing back on the ideals of mainstream schooling, lies the facilitation of empowerment. Empowerment, as a

by-product of mainstream schooling is a bonus rather than a pre-requisite. Children's wellbeing comes second to the preservation of the market economy (Illich, 1970). The idea that mainstream education is empowering is challenged by its 'factory model' approach, ignoring the indispensable creativity and interests which make us unique in the first place (Illich, 1978, 1970; Illich et al., 1977). Scholars such as Paul Reville of Harvard University advocate for a 'medical model,' where learners are catered for with varying kinds of assistance for different durations (The Economist, 2021).

This background section treads a fine line in its intrepid critique on Western mainstream education, discussing the health and wellbeing implication of an education system that prepares people for jobs and the marketplace, but neglects the facilitation of empowerment and wellbeing and its illustrious possibilities. In the quiet complacency that hovers around mainstream education, this section acknowledges that the system is the only functioning education for the masses. Nevertheless, the pandemic has offered an opportunity to dare to challenge an archaic system that was never intended to empower marginalised, rural, non-Western people, particularly women and girls. Rather, it was a system intended to perpetuate underdevelopment running parallel to development theory which, as Rodney (1972) argues, constricts the individual who matters in developing society through education. The audacious examination of looking beyond jobs and education is a form of political activism. Covid-19 has allowed for a new wave of legitimacy to forge an education system that is broad and inclusive, established on principles of health and wellbeing to expand empowerment. The failures of the mismanagement of the pandemic (Davies, 2022) provide the possibility to reposition mainstream education on the promotion of wellbeing. Following prominent discussions surrounding the decolonisation of the curriculum, this background chapter argues against a reactionary stance. Rather, this impetuosity to decolonise research and education is superficial and narrow in its earnest effort to draw attention to the colonial legacy that remains within mainstream education (Begum and Saini, 2019; Emejulu, 2019). The chapter further argues that such movements are still within the confines of the current capitalist

structures of our modern society, which distract the attention from a pedagogy of the oppressed (Shiva, 1999; Freire, 1972; Rodney, 1972).

Scholars and practitioners like Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, James Baldwin, Vandana Shiva, Ivan Illich, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Fidel Castro have operationalised theory, shaking the foundations of institutions that run deep with bondage. The argument made by Rodney (1972) and Fanon (1961) is that the non-serving element of the education system is for the people's freedom. "This type of education system was used to hold the colonised people in its grip and for squeezing their brain in all forms and content and even destroying their identity" (Fanon 1961, p.169). In this way, the education system as a tool has proved to be incredibly successful, which raises the question of why do we resist a reimagination of an education system for the critical consciousness of the masses? (Giroux, 2001; Freire, 1972).

2.5.2 Mental Health

William James's *Moral Equivalent of War* (1910) makes a scathing critique of the individual pursuit of pleasure. He argues that peacetime is only viable in a society that allows its citizens to have a meaningful cause that embodies elements of hardship, demands and common struggle (Solnit, 2009). This argument can easily be misinterpreted as the glorification of suffering. He speaks from a personal experience of being born into pleasure and his struggle to find meaning. His argument brings forth an important point that is the bystander syndrome or the parasitic citizen educated to consume.

If there were, instead of military conscription, a conscription of the whole youthful population to form for a certain number of years a part of the army enlisted against *nature* ... then even privileged youths would understand ... man's relations to the globe he lives on, and to the permanently sour and hard foundations of his higher life (Solnit, 2009, p.53).

The modern consumer capitalist societies are more than ever creating passive bystanders. This can be seen in formal humanitarianism and the dominant vulnerability paradigms inflicted on affected communities. Concepts such as

vulnerability and 'Do No Harm' are gospel in the current Western ethical frameworks, yet often overlook local ethical values, and practices (Jayawickrama, 2013). Covid-19 as a global pandemic exposed many people's inability to deal with uncertainty and revealed a deeply unhappy society. And despite the comforts that cushion Western living one must question the value of accreditation, and whether our current education system facilitates happiness?

The Bondei proverb, "Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable" (Ngomane, 2019, p.32), is relevant in times of difficulty. Britain has seen a surge of mental health and wellbeing issues during the Covid-19 global pandemic. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) reported 5.0% of people in Great Britain as feeling lonely 'often' or 'always' between April and May 2020 on pre-lockdown due to Covid-19. From those asked seven days into the lockdown, 30.9% (7.4 million) reported their wellbeing was affected by feelings of loneliness, highlighting the fragile state of the current education system in failing to enable people to withstand challenges, isolation and to seek happiness internally (Milam, 2021; Pandya, 2020).

The concept of happiness was elicited throughout the narrative literature review findings. The modern notion of happiness, which is externally focused, follows a similar direction to that of the modern ontological and epistemological understanding of education, empowerment, health and wellbeing. A rise in suicides from the pressures of Covid-19 affecting young people shows that modern society does not know how to be happy (Milam, 2021). The coping mechanisms from ancient wisdom such as introspection, self-governance, suppleness, meditation, and mindfulness are not being incorporated into mainstream education, signalling a missed opportunity to harness this wisdom (Rinpoche, 2008; Khantipālo, 1997; Ryser, 1997; Radhakrishnan, 1963, 1950; Rao, no date). Being human, from an ancient pedagogical lens, is an entirely internal process (Radhakrishnan, 1963), fundamentally different to an education system that is almost exclusively based on memorisation and external accumulation of knowledge (Brown and Samuel, 2013; Giroux, 2001b; Illich, 1978, 1970). At the core of this background chapter is the need for pluralism when it comes to education and wellbeing. This thesis stresses

on indigenous, marginalised, and local teaching, training, and healing systems as necessary (Bracket et al., 2021), as shown in the context of Covid-19.

2.6 Theoretical Foundation From - Ancient to Modern

This background chapter provokes a radical conceptualisation of empowerment, disrupting the status quo of Western notions of human development. It further encourages a re-examination of the endemic health issues and frustrations that Western education is inflicting on Western society. This chapter further looks at the concept of interconnectedness, traditional knowledge, and wisdom, as it establishes a different operational aspect to empowerment grounded in the Hindu science and its interpretation of the feminine principle. The Chipko concept is a methodology used by marginalised and rural women of India to defend their forests from the exploitation of Westernised economic development through the feminine principle of preservation and recovery (Shiva, 1999).

Oneness and unity fall beyond feminist and Marxist ideological boundaries that serve as a lens to identify differences, but falls short in uniting through love, humanity, compassion, and similarities. Transcending to a state of humanness begins with connecting back to the feminine principle (Shiva, 1999). The primordial energy from the perspective of Indian cosmology depicts a symbiotic relationship between creation and destruction. What lies between this cohesion is the emergence of *Shakti* – that is, the life of everything manifested as *Prakriti* – nature or Mother Earth (Shiva, 1999). The feminine principle ceases to become about external differences, imparting a non-gender-based ideology of liberation. Without *Shakti*, there is no *Shiva* – the force of creation and destruction (Shiva, 1999). Balance and harmony rooted in the principle of femininity subsequently replace unbalanced power structures and a commodities economy founded on technologies that extract and enslave (Swaraj, 2021).

Empowered marginalised and rural women are present throughout our history and continue to advocate for the right to all life through their collective oneness. Their courage does not stem from the enactment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Still, their participation in nature has set a deep

understanding of balance and interconnectedness; they draw their strength from *shakti* – strength. According to Itwari Devi:

Shakti [strength] comes to us from these forests and grasslands: we watch them grow, year in and year out through their internal Shakti, and we derive our strength from it. We watch our streams renew themselves and we drink their clear and sparkling water – that gives us shakti. We drink fresh milk, we eat ghee, we eat food from our own fields ... that we are our own masters, we control, and produce our own wealth. That is why ‘primitive,’ backward women who do not buy their needs from the market but produce them themselves are leading Chipko (Shiva, 1999, pp. 198-199).

2.6.1 Chipko, Feminine Principles, and Every-day Resistance

The Chipko movement is a non-formal political participation through protest and mobilisation, and although it falls short of the ambit of the narrow construct of formal politics it nonetheless sent shudders across the global political and environmental landscape. The Hindu science on the feminine principle offers a profound analysis that draws on the spiritual worship of a mother goddess as the source of life and fertility through the *devī-māhātmya* – glory of the goddess (Marsman, 2019). The multiplicity of the Hindu text that depicts the 10 sciences through goddesses written around the 6th century celebrates the divine feminine (Kinsley, 1978). The foundation of the world from which wisdom is born is the great function of the feminine mother nature, and it is from this premise that the feminine principle unfolds into an energy that is untenable and uncontrollable in all forms (Watts, 1987). Indian cosmology in both the exoteric and esoteric traditions depict creation and destruction as born from the dialectic play between two opposing energies. That give rise to motion and movement, that is between the energies *shakti* and *shiva* (Shiva, 1999). The Devi Upanishad is part of the five Atharvashiras Upanishads, which teaches that *shakti* – the dynamic energy or generative force is essentially *Brahman* – The Supreme Being, the ultimate Reality in the universe that is in everything and all-pervading (M, 2017). *Shakti* being the energising force behind all male divinity, is (*i*) in *shiva* – the embodiment of consciousness. In the yogic science without *shakti*, *sh(i)va* would be *shava*, meaning corpse, sterile and still (M, 2017). Similarly, the spiritual essence of the feminine

principle is also depicted in the ancient teachings of Taoism: “True Earth arrests true lead; true lead controls true mercury. Lead and mercury return to true Earth. Body and mind are tranquil and still.” The representation of true Earth is not the material Earth, but the true intent of the human body that draws parallels to the feminine of Mother Earth. True lead that symbolises real knowledge/ true sense, the illumination that is born from the feminine is what controls the spiritual essence (Po-Tuan, 1986).

There are 10 goddesses of wisdom which manifest the divine feminine and collectively make up the multifaceted understanding of nature. This section examines the experience of the feminine principle through the fierce, bloodthirsty goddess *Kali*, a quintessential embodiment of *shakti*. *Kali* is an all-consuming force represented as a black woman with white fangs, and a protruding tongue from her mouth. She has four arms, and in one hand she carries the head of a slain demon. In the other, a sword, whilst she motions her worshippers to draw closer. She is decorated with a necklace of skulls and earrings of two dead bodies. *Kali* is depicted as only wearing a girdle made from dead men’s hands, her eyes are red, bloodstained, and dishevelled. She stands menacingly with one foot on the thigh of her husband *Shiva*, and the other on his chest. From a feminist lens, this depiction of the feminine disrupts the archetype of a woman driven by Western binary thinking that hold a traditional interpretation of femininity found within the Abrahamic religions (Dalmiya, 2000). Drawing from the mainstream interpretation of Christian tradition, even Jesus experienced God as a father, suggesting a deep patriarchal influence within Western structures. The feminine principle offers an alternative, that explores a non-violent rebellion against the authoritarian patriarchal system that forms so much of our own thinking. *Kali*’s presence breaks the confines of man and woman (see): *Kali*, the great mother, stands on *Shiva*; all things are destroyed and reborn through her. The feminine principle is a non-gender-based ideology of liberation (Shiva, 1999). This is seen in how *Kali* encourages her worshippers towards her. The devotees are called *bhakti – Kali-bhakti*. Ramprasad Sen's work, an 18th century Bengali poet, describes the worship of *Kali* as a humbling act of redemption (Dalmiya, 2000).



Figure 4 Picture of the goddess, Kali (Source: ExoticIndiaArt, 2000).

Kali's black nature is the absorption of all things, which signifies her nature as the ultimate reality and transcendence of all form;

Is Kali, my Divine Mother, of a black complexion?
She appears black because She is viewed from a distance;
But when intimately known She is no longer so.
The sky appears blue at a distance, but look at it close by
And you will find that it has no colour.
The water of the ocean looks blue at a distance,
but when you go near and take it in your hand,
you find that it is colourless.

Ramakrishna Paramhansa (1836-86) (Kumar, 2000)

The poet touches on the illusion and a state of separateness that binds humans through the five senses, which cause distortion to the absolute truth (M, 2017). The feminine principle draws on an internal journey and devotion to reconnect with our true nature to realise the fullness of our 'being' (Kumar, 2000). From an operational aspect, *Kali* represents a confrontation where through devotion we are dissolved, in this, nature does not become something that we save, but rather a quest for the ultimate truth about our existence. The ability to see things from different dimensions is the poet's illumination (M, 2017). The symbolism of *Kali* holding a sword in one hand is her ability to cut through the knots of ignorance that bind us (Kumar, 2000).

This Chipko concept is an example of the operationalisation of the feminine principle. It was a movement led by rural women in India that began over 300 years ago: women sacrificed their lives to save their sacred *Kherji* trees by clinging to them. This is the methodology of *Chipko*, to hug (Natesh, 2020; Shiva, 1999). The Khejarli sacrifice was led by non-violence on the part of the Bishnois community. There is a deeper knowledge that is embedded within *Chipko*; it is their *dharma* – 'the right way of living' (Natesh, 2020). Similarly, the Buddhist perspective on ecology is guided by the three aspects of the *dhamma*; wisdom (*prajna*), meditation (*dhyana*), and morality (*sila*) (Henning, 2002). Experiencing ourselves as part of nature is a reconciliatory experience to understanding ourselves beyond the ego. The core of the feminine principle is for change to occur within ourselves. This is the fork in the road that separates an ecological movement and the Western scientific approach to ecology, that studies nature as a separate object (Henning, 2002). One of the difficulties with climate action driven by a mainstream agenda is that much of the issues are rooted in economic models of unlimited growth (Henning, 2002). The mounting anthropocentric world views threaten to continue the endemic colonial wheel steered by tech giants, corporate globalisation through the privatisation of knowledge and seed patents, as an expansion of modernity (Shiva, 1999).

Similarly, mainstream institutions fail to recognise the many thousands of peasants and indigenous women in science, traditional health care practice,

informal politics and governance, soil scientists, ethnobotany specialists, water managers, and plant breeders. The Western stigmatisation towards rural and marginalised communities as vulnerable and uneducated does little to explain the agency displayed in protests carried out by Indian farmers in the wake of a global pandemic and the uproar of Colombia's poor and working-class communities against oppressive tax reforms (Ellis-Petersen, 2021; Torrado, Hernandez Bonilla and Osorio, 2021).

The methodology of hugging is also a scientific methodological framework of sacrifice for the greater good; this very humane act embodies the boldness and moral language between suffering and healing that is care (Kleinman, 2020). The Chipko concept is based on traditional scientific intelligence and has both an ontological and epistemological grounding. Care is an intrinsic part of service and a characteristic of the feminine principle. This is neither a female trait nor a gender-based ideology. Instead, it is a fundamental human expression that needs to be learned to establish deep human connections with each other and nature (Kleinman, 2020). *Kali's* boon is won when humans confront and accept their real nature. Humans are not the saviours of the planet or each other (Kumar, 2000). The Chipko concept is self-modelled through the complete absorption of ourselves into nature. The emergence of the ecological self is an internal human process of rebirth and not a movement of external participation (Dalmiya, 2000). Furthermore, there is a deep intelligence in the act of care and love, it is not simply sacrificial. The women of the Chipko concept understand that care and love can only be given on a local level. Using touch, they act out their dedication and worship of nature (Shiva, 1999). Modernity has forsaken and divorced science from spirituality.

2.6.2 The Wayuu Principles of Reparation and Compensation—The Pütchipü'üi (Palabrerros) – The Orators

The Wayuu normative system of reparation and compensation offers a sophisticated and pragmatic approach to dealing with conflict and uncertainty (UNESCO, no date). This background chapter looks at Covid-19 not just as a pathology, but examines the political, social, cultural, and economic elements that have contributed to how people have been affected by the pandemic, drawing from

a medical anthropological lens (Kleinman, 2006, 1995; Patel and Kleinman, 2003). The Wayuu community inhabits an area of Colombia called the Guajira Peninsula straddling Venezuela, and is the largest indigenous community in Colombia. The Wayuu people are no strangers to adversity and danger and have been subject to drought, illness, poverty, and conflict. In 2011, the building of the Cercad Dam drained their only nearby source of water, the Rancheria River, exposing them to three-hour walks to wells containing polluted water (Rosso, 2016).

Drawing from the Wayuu people's normative conflict framework, a remarkable element of this community is their use of dreams and meta skills in their conflict resolution process. The Wayuu people see "conflict as an integral part of human nature" (Vasquez Del Rio, 2014, p.3). This deep understanding of life is at odds with modern comforts and attempts to disguise uncertainty, impermanence, and danger (Jayawickrama, 2018, 2013; Kleinman, 2006). Technology, superficial solutions, and comfortability, are disabling modern industrial societies from being able to cope (Brown and Samuel, 2013; Illich et al., 1977; Illich, 1973). In this way, the essence of life has been convoluted, and one must question what do the *educated* really understand about life and humanity if this principle has been forgotten?

The political, social, cultural, and economic consequences grip communities that have been disabled in their coping ability to withstand uncertainty. For example, the rise of poverty, and children suffering from life-threatening malnutrition have intensified in the world's worst humanitarian crises, such as in Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (UNICEF, 2021a). Surprisingly these humanitarian crises are fuelled by mainly *educated* elites' handling and interference in global political agendas (Rose, 2019). The idea of the "White Man's Burden," a poem by Rudyard Kipling (1899), continues to be as relevant today as it was at the height of colonisation. The ability for communities to forge conflict resolution systems, healing systems, and pedagogy relevant to their context is the facilitation of empowerment. The self-governance that is displayed by the Wayuu people is a testament to that. The Wayuu legislative system is comprised of principles, procedures, and rituals that govern the social and spiritual

behaviour of this community. The *Pütchipü'üi* (palabrerros) – The Orators are sought by both the offender and the offended with the goal of reconciliation, through dialogue and compensation to establish social harmony (Vasquez Del Rio, 2014; UNESCO, no date). In this way, the community take on a shared responsibility through active participation. This is a key concept lacking in many of the approaches used by developed societies in times of crisis. The community led approach by the Wayuu people challenge the Darwinian idea that people cannot be trusted to regroup and co-ordinate to participate in rising together from life's uncertainties (Solnit, 2009).

2.7 Conclusion

The aim of the thesis to examine beyond jobs and schools is daring. To move against the comforts of our modern Western society and question our transactional relationship with our governments and institutions leaves bare the void between citizen and consumer. The lack of responsibility towards us, and others signals a mainstream education system that fails to facilitate empowerment. The broad brushstrokes of vulnerability that are usually applied to marginalised, rural, and indigenous communities, particularly to women and girls, prevent an examination into the political, social, cultural, and economic implications of those vulnerable settings, leaving in the shadows the greed of a service needs economy (Brown and Samuel, 2013; Illich, 1978, 1973, 1970; Illich et al., 1977). In the proliferation of arrogance that emerges from the consumption of education rises an inability to learn from the coping with uncertainty and danger from the *uneducated* (Illich, 1970). A common thread to this thesis is that we all want to be happy, despite our complex social differences. This chapter discusses the link between education and health and examines the void that has separated the two. Health and wellbeing are intrinsic to community cohesion, relations, and care. Our relationship to wellbeing should start with an education system that draws us closer to understanding who we are (Watts, 1987). In this way, empowerment is not measured using a Western metric of education attainment and monetary wealth, but rather the ability to cope

and withstand change and uncertainty with joy. The next chapter explains and justifies and elaborates the methodological journey of this PhD research.

3 Methodology, Methods, and Caveats

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is an overview of the methodological framework for this research study. This chapter is written in two parts. The first part addresses the theoretical aspects to the research and provides the justification and rationale for the various methods used. Furthermore, this section discusses how the various methods come together. The latter section discusses the field work and provides a practical guide on the coding process, thematic analyses and steps taken to review the themes.

The chapter presents a qualitative research design using a three-method process:

1. An autoethnographic account of a journey seeking empowerment through education.
2. Participatory observation of a virtual community.
3. Key stakeholder engagements

The methodological framework weaves in a range of methodologies, methods, and theories, breaking away from the strict confines of Western scientific protocol. The findings from the scoping review and the narrative literature review highlighted the constriction of hierarchical structures and the disempowerment in the disablement of creativity which has influenced the methodological framework of this research (Blaak, Openjuru and Zeelen, 2013; Schipper, 2012; Shah, 2011; Khantipālo, 1997; Illich et al., 1977; Rodney, 1972; Illich, 1970). Although modern theories of development, anthropology, sociology, conflict transformation, and empowerment were examined in the beginning, the thesis unfolded after conducting the scoping review. The findings showed a gap in knowledge and highlighted a need to look beyond these modern theories to understand the relationship between education, empowerment and wellbeing in a manner that satisfied the findings from the scoping review. Thus, the grounding to look beyond modern pedagogical approaches, theories and philosophies relating to education,

empowerment and wellbeing is drawn from the narrative literature review. It is from this premise that the adaptability and necessity of ancient wisdom, traditional pedagogical approaches, and the discussion of liberation and freedom are woven into the research design. Buddhism, Hinduism, Ubuntu, Daoism and Ancient Mayan philosophies, in conjunction to the grounding of anthropological and sociological theory are woven to impart an empowerment praxis to this research design. Thus, this thesis embodies the same principles it argues through its presentation, methodological framework, and methods (Williams Norissa, 2021).

This chapter has a unique research design by default with its de-emphasis on methodology and prioritisation of the research inquiry (Yanchar, Gantt, and Clay, 2005). Dominant Western paradigms continue to dominate social science research of non-Western countries. The methodological framework to this research acknowledges the ethnocultural diversity that binds the research together, through its three-method process breaking away from colonial normative frameworks (Mohanty, 2007). In this somewhat anarchistic approach, techniques and methods are, at times, applied less stringently, and the process of reaching such choices is elaborated in this chapter. In essence, this chapter reads like a 'traditional family recipe,'. Various ingredients are brought into the mix to complement each other and bring about methodological pluralism (Slife and Gantt, 1999). In the anarchist vein, notions of neutrality and objectivity are contested. Feminist researchers have long argued that objectivity is a mere appearance, where 'neutrality' harbours a politicised position in itself (Coy, Smiley and Tyler, 2019). Navigating the dominant structures that govern research guidelines to separate researchers and research for issues of reliability and validity is a difficult balancing act when applying neutrality to relationship building (Datta, 2017). The three-method processes dispel these invisible power dynamics as I display my own vulnerability; I respond to my key stakeholders as both a woman and a researcher (Coy, Smiley and Tyler, 2019; Datta, 2017).

Observation, a fundamental method running deep within the three-method process is used in different degrees. It is key in the last of the second of the stage methods. Observation is an essentiality in capturing 'information'; "The concept of

information is defined as processed data or meaningful data. The model thus suggests that observation is the only way of knowing and the only way knowledge can be attained” (Lai MA, 2013, p.170). This chapter further discusses the process of understanding the data collected and the relationship between information and interpretation (Lai MA, 2013; Yanchar, Gantt, and Clay, 2005).

3.2 Research Question

The guiding philosophical underpinnings of this research take on a critical and emancipatory stance in line with indigenous, critical and liberatory methodologies (Held, 2019). From the inception of this research, reflection has been a means to elucidate the experiences that have shaped me as a woman and researcher, paving the way for an authentic interrogation throughout the three-method process (Mortari, 2015). Thus, critical reflexivity, self-governance, non-judgemental, and empowerment praxis, help formulate the overarching research question (Elder and Odoyo, 2018).

The term *self-governance* comes from the scoping and narrative literature review findings and is further reaffirmed in the research. From the outset of the research inquiry the term is used to mean: To govern oneself internally and live consciously, to exert control over one's life and decision-making, showing independence, respect to oneself, and choice (M, 2017, 2012; Shah, 2016; Seeberg, 2014; Blaak, Openjuru and Zeelen, 2013; Khantipālo, 1997; Vivekananda, 1989). In this critical examination of contemporary pedagogical philosophies and approaches, the analysis of ancient and non-mainstream pedagogical philosophies has disembowelled the depth of wisdom of ‘other(ed)’ ways of knowing (Thambinathan and Kinsella, 2021). It has thus facilitated a deeper understanding of how colonisation and the legacy of bondage embroiled in arrogance and ignorance have impacted non-Western women's journey to empowerment (Campbell and Teghtsoonian, 2010; Nussbaum, 2000; Shiva, 1999). The lens of self-governance fits with an indigenous methodological lens facilitating an inclusive scope, making sense of the varied experiences of empowerment and learning that may not fit the tight restraints of Western models of women's empowerment and corporate feminism

(Thambinathan and Kinsella, 2021; Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, 2019; Datta, 2017). The research questions help dispel through this process the universal standard of empowerment used by Western modes of thinking and prioritise the 'knowing, being and becoming' of women from the Global South, who have experienced rurality, marginalisation, and disempowerment from colonial structures (Smith, 1999, p.56).

The overarching research question is: Do educational experiences empower women in non-Western societies?

Framing a research question in this manner attempts to critically understand the inequities present from a strength-based process of inquiry and examination. The research question encourages a critical inquiry into the journey of freedom, resistance, and self-determination, supporting the invaluable examples of empowerment from non-Western women that remain uncolonized (Ryder, Mackean, *et al.*, 2020, pp.262-263). The issues surrounding girls' and women's empowerment have been extensively discussed in this thesis. Although empowerment is a highly contested term from a policy perspective, mainstream empowerment interventions are geared towards increasing women's material resources to increasing choices (Foulds, 2014; Chant, 2008).

From an anthropological lens and its branch, ethnography, the lived practices of societies make up the bedrock of learning (Kleinman, 1995; Rodney, 1972; Illich, 1970). Cultural systems integrate meaning and shape the experience of the body, morals and social goods (Kleinman, 2020, pp.86-87). This research looks at these narratives to provide in-depth descriptive data that can uncover these moral worlds to define what matters most to people in the context of wellbeing (Kleinman, 2020, p.87). This qualitative research study investigates and builds on two questions: the scoping review question:

Do the contemporary educational approaches facilitate empowerment?

and the narrative literature review question:

Can ancient pedagogical approaches be adapted to facilitate empowerment?

The standard approach to global mainstream education relies heavily on benchmarks, targets, and indicators from various international bodies that fail to consider the diverse context of education settings (Boeren, 2019). Thus, the methodological framework proposed grapples with a fundamental question of the purpose of education from the experience of women from the Global South. The dynamic life experiences of the key stakeholders which share non-Western cultures and the members of virtual communities are also representatives of international agencies, NGOs, and INGOs. The two-part process of the key stakeholder engagement, firstly delves into the personal stories to empowerment. With the second part investigating the key stakeholders as representatives of the structures that enact policy and practice around empowerment, health and education. The key stakeholder engagements further examines the wider socio-political context of their community setting , unearthing the complexities of the phenomena on a micro, meso and macro level (Boeren, 2019; Bush, 2000).

From a phenomenological lens, the lived experiences trickle through all three stages, each bringing an individual essence that is analysed (Mortari, 2015). The limited research for empowering pedagogy, both from an ontological and epistemological viewpoint, calls for the revival of women's voices as a learning opportunity for Western knowledge systems, through social storytelling (Murthy, 2008, p.8). The social interactions observed by the virtual community do not demise in vibrancy despite its online nature. The observation and participation of the virtual community illustrates communities ability to create deep social bonds that emerge from different social and cultural background (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2019; Zacharias and Arthurs, 2007). Our virtual world is becoming increasingly relevant, expanding ever more into our private, public, professional, and educative realities that transcend the global and local contexts (Bjork-James, 2015). From a feminist cyberethnographer lens, digital ecologies contribute to new insights connecting kinship, agency, voice, spurring political activism, and changing gender norms through our virtual world (Bjork-James, 2015; Zacharias and Arthurs, 2007). The minimal research in this area has led to the following overall research question, and sub-research questions for the three-method process are as follows:

Do educational experiences empower women in non-Western societies?

The primary sub-research questions for the three-methods are as follows:

1. Personal account for the journey seeking empowerment:

What constitutes empowerment through education?

2. Virtual community observation and participation:

What is the experience of empowerment through education?

3. Key Stakeholder Engagements:

How can education facilitate the empowerment of girls and women in relation to health and wellbeing and the ability to make meaningful life choices?

3.3 Research Design

The research design in Figure 5 follows an interdisciplinary, intradisciplinary, and multidisciplinary lens to gain insight into broader socio, political, and cultural phenomena, as shown in (Weaver-Hightower, 2011). The research design adopts general concepts of qualitative methodology including the technique of digital ethnography. Despite the digital 'field', its remit remains centred on telling social stories without any delimitation to field research (Murthy, 2008). Storytelling is entrenched throughout the three-method process. In this qualitative interpretative research design, the theoretical framework borrows phenomenology as a philosophy to understand phenomena at the level of subjective reality (Qutoshi, 2018). This phenomenological approach plays an important part in both the two-part design of the second stage method process:

1. Key stakeholders' personal account of empowerment.
2. Key stakeholders' perspectives on policy and practice on education, wellbeing, and empowerment.

The breadth of experience of the key stakeholders broadened the scope to understanding empowerment and education and wellbeing through lived experience. Furthermore, commonalities of these women folk from the Middle

East, Africa, Asia, South America, and the United Kingdom emerged despite the different complex social, economic, and political contexts. Thus supporting the findings from the scoping review and the narrative literature review (Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio, 2019; Errasti-Ibarrondo et al., 2018). All of the three stage method process varies in writing styles, which tread a fine balance between the analytical and the evocative (Anderson, 2006). This same analytic vein is carried throughout the three stages reciprocally as I present myself explicitly as a researcher and a woman in all the variations of life's experiences. In the same manner, the key stakeholders have also transmitted this same authenticity, which has contributed to effectively communicating a social story drawing the reader closer into the daily lives of key stakeholders (Lai MA, 2013; Weaver-Hightower, 2011; Anderson, 2006). Throughout this chapter different ways of knowing are legitimised, challenging dominance of traditional science and research (Lai MA, 2013; Mayuzumi, 2009; Chang, 2008; Wall, 2008). Figure 5 Research design. provides an overview of the overall research design and although it lists the three-method process in numerical order for structural purposes, the operationalisation of the research adopted a fluid approach. There is a weaving of different lenses of analysis throughout the three-method process, with all stages conducted in unison. The continuing section discusses the purpose and objectives which holds together the overall research design.

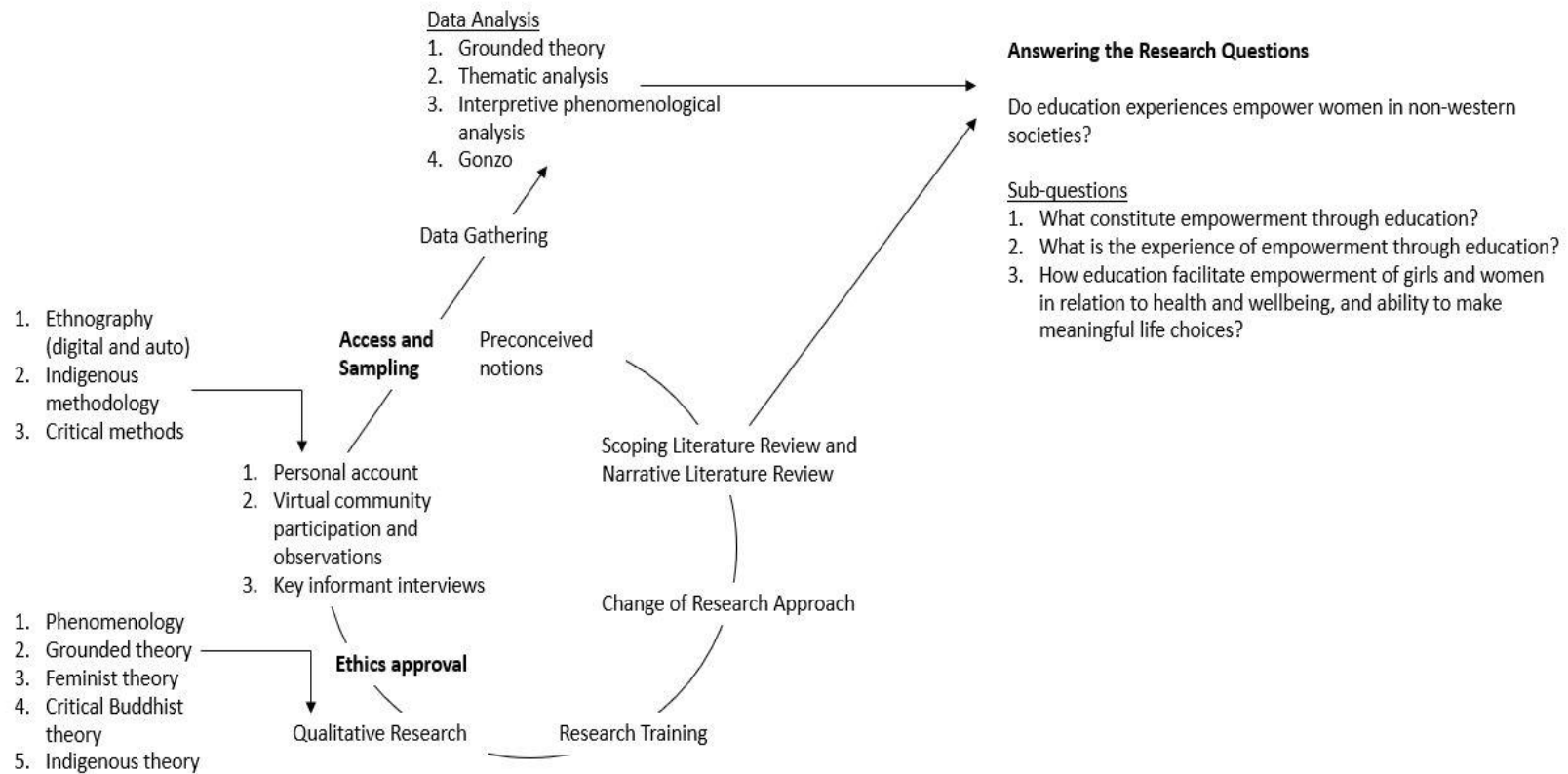


Figure 5 Research design.

3.4 Methods

The data collection methods used in the research design are discussed in a systematic order. The data collection for the first of the three-method was achieved by writing an autobiographical account. Autoethnography as a method encompasses both process and product (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011). In contrast to qualitative ethnographic fieldwork that requires the emersion of the researcher in an environment and direct contact with others, autoethnographic fieldwork is an emersion of recollection and reflection (Chang, 2008). Through memory, recounting the narratives that made part of my childhood, I was able to weave in the life stories of my grandmother and mother (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Furthermore, the data gathering took a month of writing. Due to the demand of this recollection process, I pulled in and out from the text to allow deep reflection and conversations with close family members and my supervisor, Dr Janaka Jayawickrama. By pulling away and create a space between writing the process was greatly beneficial and healing (Foster, McAllister and O'Brien, 2005). In this simultaneous process, as I pulled in and out of my own autoethnographic account, I was also conducting the virtual community participation and observation research. Ten meeting sessions were recorded from the virtual community's participant observations, resulting in 21 hours of observation time across three months from April to July 2021. The sessions usually comprised 10 to 30 members and ranged from a wide variation of agendas to engage members in advocacy, communication, research meetings, and member events. The virtual community's participant observations did not include online data as a common denominator of virtual studies (Varis, 2014). These sessions took place on a virtual meeting platform, like Zoom or Google-meets and were carried out in a conference style setting. I used an independent audio recorder to be unobtrusive and prevent disruption (Pink, 2015). The primary data collected for the second and third method process were members' spoken words with their cameras both on and off. This resulted in the bulk of the data collection for methods two and three. The participation element to the virtual communities is centred around all members knowing that I am a researcher and a temporary member of their community

(Barratt and Maddox, 2016; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The complexities of their global and local worlds can be understood from adopting a feminist lens; these trans-local and wider experiences merge when the participants encounter one another (Hjorth et al., 2017; Varis, 2014, p.2). The data gathered were transcribed in NVivo and simultaneously coded in conjunction with observation notes (Pink, 2015). As part of the final process of data gathering, specific to the third-method process, I established a two-process interview that allowed the key stakeholder interviewees to delve into rich descriptive narratives of their experiences of empowerment and to connect these experiences from a policy and practice perspective bringing an ethnographic lens to the discussion.

3.4.1 Rationale for Sampling Approach

Purposeful sampling is a widely used qualitative research technique that identifies and selects information-rich cases, which is effective and appropriate in cases of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This was key to the research inquiry, particularly due to time constraints that dictated the completion of the thesis. Purposeful sampling was adopted for methods two and three, of the three-method process, to select virtual communities and individuals with a deep knowledge both from a personal and work perspective about the empowerment of women and girls, education, health and wellbeing (Palinkas et al., 2015). This sampling method required the judgement of the researcher to identify potential participants who could provide rich and informed accounts of their experiences of empowerment through education (Moser and Korstjens, 2018). The use of thematic analysis as the chosen method of analysis demands a small number of participants who can offer this depth and insight. In addition to the prerequisite of knowledge and experience, in the ongoing observation and participation of the virtual communities, members displayed a keenness and willingness to express and articulate their understanding about the phenomenon of interest in a reflective manner (Bernard, 2002). Through purposeful sampling, and the two-stage key informant interview process, a rich narration of lives, familial struggles, and lessons learnt were possible, followed by discussion of the phenomena of interest from a policy perspective.

As qualitative methods place emphasis on saturation, the recruitment of participants happened in parallel with the observation and participation of the virtual community, so that there was no time pressure to obtain a comprehensive understanding. If new substantive information was required, I could still pursue recruitment after the observation of the virtual community had ended (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

3.4.2 Research Method One: A Personal Account of the Journey Seeking Empowerment Through Education

Method one is a reflective written account of my experience with empowerment. It examines coping mechanisms learnt and explores links between learning and wellbeing. This autoethnographic account goes beyond my experiences and into the lives of my grandmother and mother. Therefore, acknowledging their empowerment landscape, and weaving their stories in with mine. This first stage method strengthens the thesis through a deep reflective process and introduces my cultural roots and exposure to marginalised and rural women. The method process holds an invaluable positioning in the research design. In many ways autoethnography is like holding up a mirror, and as you peer through and study your reflection, you question the “Who am I really?” (Vasudev, 2016; Kabat-Zin, 2003; Krishnamurti, 1978; Buddha, c. 563/480-c. 483/400 BCE). Since the beginning of the human civilisation, this has been a question that shows up in ancient texts as humans have always grappled with this (Buddha, c. 563/480-c. 483/400 BCE). As argued by Campbell (2016), autoethnography is both a research method and methodology that places the self within a social context. Although there has been an increase in autoethnography, and autobiographical accounts in the social sciences literature including life-histories there is still more progress to be made. The contributions of autoethnography and autobiography to scientific research are the epistemological positions that highlight the diversity of perspectives, in accord with contemporary feminist, post structuralist, post colonialist, and indigenous standpoints (Atkinson, 1999). The legitimisation of the first stage method into the narratives of my mother and grandmother, and my narrative facilitated the dismantling of prejudices, biases and discrimination that

seep into the unexplored realms of consciousness (Williams, 2021; Dutta and Basu, 2018; Mayuzumi, 2009; Atkinson, 1999). These personal narratives have amplified a deeper sociological understanding within the context of Colombia, womanhood, refugee status, poverty, rurality, marginalisation, whilst examining the broad educational experience both from a non-Western and Western perspective (Wall, 2008).

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that:

- 1) Uses a researcher's personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences.
- 2) Promotes the researcher's relationship with others as an integral part of the research.
- 3) Uses self-reflection to illuminate the intersections between self and society.
- 4) Evokes meaning by discussing trauma and struggles.
- 5) It is a form of research that brings together heart and mind, balancing intellectual and methodological rigour, emotion, and creativity.
- 6) Strives for social justice and promotes a sense of liberation.

Autoethnography as a method is a courageous act that through its evocative narrative brings out important aspects of experience, much like the writing of Arthur Kleinman (2020) in his account of the loss of his wife. Here Kleinman (2020) recounts his love story and intertwines it with the polemic around care or its absence in the medical system. His own journey with care and the challenges which he faced are presented in a very honest account about his own failures. My autoethnographic account discusses the experience of education supporting the aim and objectives of this research, whilst also bringing in relevant literature on pedagogy, health and wellbeing, and topics of mentorship.

3.4.3 Research Method Two: Observation and Participation of a Virtual Community

The virtual community in this research is a professional organisation working within the humanitarian and development sector. The network members are established

women within the industry. Furthermore, the community members are representatives of the UN, INGOs, and other global platforms, which discuss and decide policy and practice impacting the empowerment of women and girls across the globe. This research did not engage with any social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp Groups, or chat rooms. The virtual community observed has a chair responsible for its members and such spaces are established practice in the humanitarian and development field. The method of analysis for the second stage method uses a gonzo journalistic interdisciplinary. This method process captures the complex power dynamics, and interactions between people. It further explores how the members learn and how they set shared goals and what empowerment mean to them.

As part of the virtual community observation and participation, the focus of this second method process was on the dynamics of the community, how they learn, their shared goals and how those aspects of offline reality and online reality flow together (Pink et al., 2016; Varis, 2014). The ethical research guidelines set out by Schrum (1995), identify virtual communities as social groups, that through the internet, develop notable human emotion, frequency, and personal relationships, requiring new tools to master this ethical qualitative research. Considering the global pandemic, digital environments are a continuation rather than a rupture to field sites (Hjorth et al., 2017). This naturalness of field settings facilitates an in-depth study of a virtual community in a participant observation format generating patterns for interpretation through the data analysis (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.3). This exciting digital infrastructure represents a collaborative environment that represents women and a shared epistemology of the humanitarian context of and girl's empowerment whilst upholding common goals and values in their quest (Hjorth et al., 2017). Carter (2005, p. 149) proposes some of the key questions that make part of the ever-growing literature of digital ethnographic studies, inquiring about the relationships formed online and how real life and virtual lives are interwoven regarding lived experiences. These key questions also open for examination the limitations that lie with digital ethnography and the authenticity of the participants. Aspects of race, gender,

sexuality, privilege, and disability do not disappear in cyberspace. Instead, as Harp and Tremayne (2006, p.249) argue, “The reinforcement of traditional constructions of gender and racial power relations illustrate the conflicting potential and reality of the internet.” A further limitation is my influence as an observing participant and how this may have impacted on the group and their form of expression and participation in discussions (Richmond, 2014, p.42).

My participation and observation of the virtual community was over a four-month period. The virtual community host invited me to different virtual gatherings to observe different committees. While observing this international virtual community, my participation and observation was ‘unobtrusive,’ allowing the natural flow of the virtual community to take place and with my minimising any disruption (Webb et al., 1966). The network was welcoming, their greetings were full of excitement and as a participatory member I introduced myself too and spoke only when I was asked a direct question. I would then move back into the digital shadows listening and observing. This approach deviates slightly from the ‘non-reactive’ approach practiced by ethnographers who make no direct contact with participants (Ugoretz, 2017). From an ethics perspective, all members were briefed by the chair of my intentions to observe the virtual community. In keeping with the transparency of my role, the chair of the community was briefed from the onset about the purpose of my observation and participation. Due to the diverse nature of the members and key stakeholders, differences in their individual social and political contexts were considered and analysed through a feminist lens (Chakma, 2016).

The virtual community has a dynamic setting, and each committee and meeting had its own culture. Variation in virtual dynamics and set ups brought many unique observations. With meetings scheduled a few times in the month, not all members were always in the same virtual rooms. There were interconnected pockets of activity as members worked on ongoing projects and delved into learning and training sessions. The meetings were representative of everyday activities. The virtual community gathered to set shared goals and work through

agendas: this was the community aspect of these gatherings (Frömming et al., 2017; Hjorth et al., 2017; Pink et al., 2016; Murthy, 2008).

The use of virtual networks benefited this research by expanding the geographical scope, in the same manner it facilitated the engagement with key stakeholders who would otherwise be hard to reach (Baltar and Brunet, 2012). The use of a sound recording device and field notes allowed for the re-creation of the digital field and facilitated the understanding of the personal and cultural representations particular to the virtual communities (Pink, 2015). Through this research technique, the use of a digital recording device was an embodied mode of engagement and participation into the everyday occurrences of the virtual community and a part of the sensory environment (Pink, 2015, p.125).

3.4.4 Research Method Process Three: Engagement

This method is a two-part in-depth semi-structured engagement, with 10 key stakeholders across both interview phases (a) and (b). The key stakeholders are women who have substantial experience in the field, who are experts, and are not deemed vulnerable, who have a diverse background and experience with education in all its forms (Ponic, Reid and Frisby, 2010). This research design is informed by guidance for determining the number of participants based on the type of analysis proposed (Crouch and McKenzie, 2016). Three to six participants are required for interviews in a phenomenological study; a grounded theory study, with interviews conducted once or twice, requires 20 to 30 participants. Taking this level of detail into account and as both types of analysis are being adopted, this research uses in-depth semi-structured engagement techniques accommodating both approaches (Guest, Brunce and Johnson, 2006). As discussed in this chapter the method of semi-structured interviews does not fit the technique used in this qualitative methodological framework, as an interview method adheres to a separation between researcher and participant (Datta, 2017).

The key stakeholder engagements are conducted in two parts; the first stage delves into the lived experience of the participant and their journey to empowerment. The second part focuses on policy implications regarding empowerment, education, health, and wellbeing, as the participants delve into

their working experience, providing a professional and social context of the phenomena (Underberg-Goode, 2016).

As qualitative methods place emphasis on saturation, the recruitment of participants happened in parallel with the observation and participation of the virtual community, to avoid time constraint (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The shared experiences of the women participants were described through a phenomenological, ethnographic feminist lens, reducing the experiences lived to their universal essence (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 17). The challenges that come with using phenomenology as a research method are in the complexity of grasping a phenomenon, its multidimensional nature and multi-layered meaning (Van Manen, 1990, p.78). The universality of the essence of phenomena does not fit into a neat definition; it is the structure of meaning from the text, its units and themes that hold the essence of the phenomena (Creswell et al., 2007; Van Manen, 1990, p.78). As discussed in the previous section, under critical methods, the research inquiry is an evolving theoretically informed process developed to conform to the subtleties of the research question and sub-questions (Yanchar, Gantt, and Clay, 2005). As the research progresses towards completion, the research design looks to grounded theory, critical Buddhist theory, and feminist theory when formulating a methodological pathway beyond identifying suffering to facilitate empowerment and self-governance (Schipper, 2012).

The key stakeholder engagements were conducted simultaneously with the remaining stage methods facilitating a researcher reflexivity that is central to critical methods (Yanchar, Gantt, and Clay, 2005). Before a key stakeholder was recruited through purposive sampling, I made contact by email to arrange an informal fifteen-minute conversation to find out more about their work, who they were, and their role within a professional capacity. The volume of data gathered from this third stage process amounted to over 20 hours of transcribable data. In this introductory session, I explained the research to facilitate the next steps and provided the consent form and the project sheet information. As key stakeholders, it was important that they took charge of the discussion. I acted more as a facilitator in these engagements which allowed the key stakeholder to go deep into

a reflection process (Ross, 2017). The questions were more of a guide to the conversation (Antelo, 2014). The conversations had a natural flow, as I interjected only to invite them to expand on a point further. In this back and forth, I also repeated my interpretation of their meaning, to give the key stakeholder the opportunity to correct me or confirm I had understood. The engagement technique also drew on a critical Buddhist theoretical lens to engage fully with humility, non-judgement, and empathy (Schipper, 2012).

3.5 Qualitative Research

Before deciding on a qualitative research study I engaged in a reflective process, which was very important in turning the lens inward before any external enquiry. This reflection began from the outset of the thesis, through a continuous engagement with literature, whilst conducting the scoping review and the literature review. Furthermore, as part of my journey on understanding 'empowerment' I took up ancient technologies such as meditation, journaling, mindfulness, and Yoga as an immersive reflective process. As argued by Mortari (2015, p.1):

Learning the practice of reflection is fundamental because it allows people to engage into a thoughtful relationship with the world-life and thus gain an awake stance about one's lived experience. A person can live in an unauthentic or in an authentic way: The unauthentic experience happens when the person adopts an unreflective stance that consists in staying passively enmeshed in one's thoughts and the authentic condition happens when the person develops a mindful stance on his or her mental life.

In this similar manner, my preconceptions and non-reflective mainstream educational experience refrained my ability to look beyond the paradigms of vulnerability. These misconceptions were applied largely to non-Western women (Shiva, 1999). My biases regarding marginalised and rural women formed by formal schooling set ideas about what empowerment meant, was an initial stumbling block to the progress of the research. The preconceived idea that empowered women only operate in the marketplace and be formally educated obstructed the flow of the research design. Assumptions about challenges equating to vulnerability as

experiences that disabled people were among my biases. I was unable to see past the difficulties of the women around me and engage with their resistance, determination, and independent decision-making, which is part of a feminist theoretical lens that is used in this qualitative research (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, 2019; Shiva, 1999).

Grappling with the idea of empowerment and what an empowered woman ought to be drew my initial interest towards a mixed methods approach (Nkwake et al., 2017). As the PhD progressed and the findings from the scoping review and the narrative literature review informed on the study only a qualitative methodology could capture the experience of the phenomena and the notion of 'becoming.' In this, the paternalistic and colonial normative framework that enshroud the development and women's empowerment discourse could be challenged (Nussbaum, 2000; Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, 2019; Shiva, 1999; Sen, 1999). Although the concept of empowerment is substantive in gender studies, education, and international development in addressing power, marginality, and agency, it is less emphasised within methodological literature (Ross, 2017). This research design adopts an empowering approach to a qualitative research methodology. The multidimensionality of empowerment understood through indices, uniformity, and universal measurement proposed fundamental challenges leaving out complex aspects of experience, interpretation, perception, insight and process that would privilege neo-colonist epistemological and ontological assumptions of women's empowerment (Ryder, Mackean, *et al.*, 2020; Nkwake et al., 2017). Furthermore, drawing from Freire's (1972) concept of critical consciousness that argues for education to be a transformative tool for awareness on social injustices, a qualitative methodology further supports a reflective process (Ross, 2017). Furthermore, the use of text as empirical material enables this research to locate the observer in the world, bringing findings from representations including semi-structured in-depth engagements, field notes, recordings, and observations (Drobot, 2012; Given, 2008; Patton, 2002).

As part of my training needs analysis, I enrolled in the Qualitative Health Research Module (HEA00033M) within the Department of Health Sciences

examining the theoretical and practical aspects of carrying out a qualitative research design. In this research design, the application of qualitative methodology is adopted as an umbrella term for numerous inquiry strategies that give meaning to the human experience through interpretation, perception and the production of the social world (Butler-Kisber, 2018; Flick, 2007; Mason, 1996). Denzin and Lincoln (2018; 2005) delineate nine historical moments of qualitative research that depict the transition from Sexton's description of the latter modern era to the postmodern way of thinking.

1. The Traditional Phase: (1900 – 1942), work was presented as objective, but was explicit with colonising depictions of reality that misrepresented other people and their cultures.
2. The Modernist Phase: (1940 – 1970), qualitative research attempted to match the rigour of quantitative research.
3. The Blurred Genres Phase: (1970 – 1986), an experimental phase with narrative ways of doing and knowing, which attended to relational aspects of research.
4. The Crisis of Representation: (mid 1980s – 1990), called on the reflexivity of the research, and emphasised all phases of the research process as a series of constructions made and interpreted by the research.
5. The Postmodern Phase: (1990 – 1995), the engagement with experimental forms of writing and participatory inquiry.
6. The Post-experimental Phase: (1995 – 2000), new ways were emerging through an arts-based way to study and portray lived experiences.
7. The Methodologically Contested Phase: (2000 – 2004), questioning methods.
8. The Fractured Future: (2005 – 2017), confronting conservative measures in its attempt to rein in qualitative inquiry to be more in line with a positivistic orientation.
9. A Punctuation Point: (2017 -), A point of reckoning to begin to understand more fully this edge of a new colonialism to keep our eyes

on issues of social justice to achieve voice and presence at the policy table.

(Butler-Kisber, 2018, pp.8-9)

This historical timeline highlights the promotion of qualitative research by education, anthropologists and sociolinguists, together with the influence of narrative and feminist work in the 1980s with the more recent arts-based methodologies surging from the postmodern movement (Butler-Kisber, 2018). The 'punctuation point' that marks the ninth moment is a continuous period that establishes the moral grounding to qualitative research on social justice issues. It marks an exciting time to understand a new colonialism that edges closer and through qualitative research, moral, allegorical and therapeutic projects can be pursued (Flick, 2007, p.7).

The exploratory nature of this research study requires a qualitative framework based on a small sample to probe beyond appearance and manifest meaning (Crouch and McKenzie, 2016). The focus of the overall research question and sub-questions are open-ended to understand people's definition of empowerment, learning, and wellbeing. Furthermore, the emerging data in this study have developed themes that provide a deeper understanding of the phenomena of 'becoming' from the perspective of the key stakeholders, virtual community and personal narrative account (Campbell, 2014). Following this same logic, the subjectivity in life's challenges and sufferings that make part of the lived experience towards empowerment, are narratives that cannot be quantified or analysed in numbers to support or refute a hypothesis (Campbell, 2014, p.3). The findings from the scoping literature review conducted indicate gaps relating to indigenous pedagogy and ancient wisdom being disregarded, mainly by contemporary, mainstream, and non-mainstream educational programmes. This has impacted on the facilitation of empowerment and wellbeing to marginalised women (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2019; Dejaeghere and Lee, 2011; Shah, 2011). This research is therefore concerned with filling this research gap, with the imperative to showcase the view of women in the Global South. While the research study is informed by theory, it is not testing existing theories. Through the

development of the research design, critiques of qualitative methodology are addressed to ensure a more robust study (Austin and Sutton, 2014; Campbell, 2014; Jonker, Pennink, and Bartjan, 2010).

3.6 Qualitative Trustworthiness

There remains a conundrum regarding the trustworthiness to qualitative research with different debates failing to draw closer to an accord. It is worth highlighting that this questioning of trustworthiness is a Euro-North American motion. A notion challenged by the non-European and non-North American research practices (Rodney, 1972; Fanon, 1961). There are three dominant arguments regarding this issue, the first is to set the same strict positivist standard that is applied to quantitative research to qualitative research; the second argument is that a new criterion should be devised for qualitative research; and the final argument is presented by those that reject any predetermined criteria for judging qualitative research (Rolfe, 2006). Considering there is no generic criteria that governs judgements of trustworthiness within qualitative research, the former two arguments are rejected. This section presents the unique and relevant approach taken to satisfy quality judgements for this research. The research design, through its stages, involves a diverse set of key stakeholders, who hold a spectrum of lived experiences from both the Global North and the Global South, and have exposure to Western and non-Western societies. In this multiplicity of key stakeholders, there is a strong triangulation of data sources. In this way, findings from this research design are independent (Denzin, 1978). A further aspect to the trustworthiness of this qualitative research study has been the continuous engagement with a reflective practice. Using grounded theory as a method, which involved the practical use of memo writing when analysing the data, the coding process involved a constant comparison, and deliberate articulation of my thoughts, feelings and reflective interpretation of the data (Mohajan and Mohajan, 2022). Subsequently, the research methodology has not been biased to formulate the desired narrative or a romanticisation of anti-colonial sentiment dividing between Western and non-Western. Rather, through the diversity of the key

stakeholders and the three-method process, the commonalities experienced as women emerged. Another commonality that united the key stakeholders in their experience was *choice* that determines an empowered state or one of disempowerment (Vasudev, 2016; Kabat-Zin, 2003; Krishnamurti, 1978).

In terms of validity, the research design shows a dynamic process with the gap between researcher and keyholder narrowed. The parameters of trustworthiness that govern this research reject the positivist application of reliability as a significant measure of quality in qualitative research. It is further argued that validity is not a technical matter as such, but rather this research interprets and applies validity as a matter of judgement (Sandelowski, 1993). To expand further on this point with a practical explanation of how validity is proven, this research is grounded on principles of engagement, presence, and deep listening (Kleinman, 2017). There has been *to-and-fro* with the key stakeholders, community and with my reflexivity, establishing a vigorous review of the interpretation of the data. In this, the research design has been instrumental in facilitating the validity and trustworthiness of this qualitative research.

The inclusion of critical methods has established a research openness that has no predetermined methodology imposed on the research data for it to fit. On the contrary, this study is research led and through the research design they key stakeholders have contributed, led, and reshaped the research design as the engagements and community participation developed. In this manner, validity and trustworthiness has been met through a flexible and organic approach rather than a set of technical steps (Sandelowski, 1993).

By imparting a feminist lens to what is classed as traditional research, that at times is gender-blind, this research design addresses domination, power, social (in)justice. The use of participatory methods to facilitate an authentic motivation for key stakeholder narratives (through cultivating partnerships) has further supported the trustworthiness of this research (Denzin, 1978).

3.6.1 Limitations of Using Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative research has its limitations and is often criticised as “biased, small scale, anecdotal, and/or lacking rigour” (see also the list of critiques below: Anderson, 2010, p.2). The three-method process entails:

1. Personal account of my journey to empowerment.
2. Participant observation of a virtual community.
3. Key stakeholder engagements.

This research has been designed to overcome initial critiques and strengthen the rigour of the research inquiry (Thomas and Magilvy, 2011; Foster, 1997; Kirk and Miller, 1986). As discussed in the previous sections, the autoethnographic part is an essential component that addresses some of the limitations in a qualitative research framework, mainly the bias, through a deeply reflective process of my experiences and those of my grandmother and mother (Williams, 2021; Lichterman, 2017; Nicholls, 2009; Dowling, 2006). To address the general limitations of qualitative research, which range from rigour and validity to volume of data and the complexities in presenting the findings, purposive sampling was used for both the second and third research method processes. The participants come from a diverse set of cultural backgrounds and educational experiences with different religious and spiritual influences, bringing a strong and accurate representation of the phenomena (Crouch and McKenzie, 2016; Robinson, 2014).

1. Research quality is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher and more easily influenced by the researcher’s personal biases and idiosyncrasies.
2. Rigour is more difficult to maintain, assess, and demonstrate.
3. The volume of data makes analysis and interpretation time-consuming.
4. It is sometimes not as well understood and accepted as quantitative research within the scientific community.

5. The researcher's presence during data gathering, which is often unavoidable in qualitative research, can affect the subjects' responses.
6. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality can present problems when presenting findings.
7. Findings can be more difficult and time-consuming to characterise in a visual way.

(Anderson, 2010, p.2-3)

Furthermore, the research inquiry has also taken to 'contradictory evidence' or deviant cases to ensure the researcher bias does not interfere with the perception of the data and analysis (Anderson, 2010). In addressing the research question, which specifically looks at educational experiences of women from non-Western societies, it was equally important to have a key stakeholder representing the Global North. In addition, the other key stakeholders had experience with Western societies and aspects of Western mainstream education. In this way, the limitations of rigour and validity are addressed as the research uses strong purposive sampling of individuals with a deep lived experience that mirror the complexities the research is addressing. In this way it does not become about white versus non-White, or the Global North against the Global South. The research design presents a spectrum of epistemological and ontological ways of being and knowing. Through a deviant case analysis, any findings generated from the data present a wide range of observations, facilitating novel theoretical relationships and assurance of a rigorous research study (Mills, Durepos, and Wiebe, 2010; Seal and Silverman, 1997). Table 1 discusses how this qualitative research framework addresses the remaining limitations through its use of methodology and methods.

Table 1 Addressing the limitations of qualitative research.

Main limitations of qualitative research	Addressing the limitations
<p>Rigour is more difficult to maintain, assess and demonstrate.</p>	<p>In ensuring rigour and validity of research findings, the research has used the techniques of contradictory evidence (deviant cases) to ensure researcher bias does not interfere or alter the perception of the data (Allen, 2017). Throughout the interview process, the participant's response was repeated back to ensure the researcher's interpretations of their responses were not inconsistent and challenging any possible assumptions or preconceived notions. The two-stage interview process allowed for a short recompilation of the previous interview and to go over similar topics from a policy perspective.</p>
<p>The volume of data makes analysis and interpretation time-consuming.</p>	<p>The coding programme NVivo was used to minimise the length of time for data analysis. The recorded interviews were transcribed onto Nvivo, whilst simultaneously coding and making observational notes.</p>
<p>It is sometimes not as well understood and accepted as quantitative research within the scientific community.</p>	<p>Despite the concern and limitations in using qualitative research, it must be stressed that even in a world where numbers and statistical analysis allow data objectification, some information is better collected, understood, and analysed using a qualitative research method (Campbell, 2014). The overarching aim of this research is to critically examine the modern philosophies and ancient wisdoms to formulate a framework that can facilitate the empowerment of women and girls. Following this same logic, the subjectivity in life's challenges and sufferings that make part of</p>

Main limitations of qualitative research	Addressing the limitations
	the lived experience towards empowerment are narratives that cannot be quantified or analysed in numbers to support or refute a hypothesis (Campbell, 2014, p.3).
<p>The researcher's presence during data gathering, which is often unavoidable in qualitative research, can affect the subjects' responses.</p> <p>Research quality is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher and more easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies.</p>	<p>The three-method design provided a natural setting for the participant observations and allowed me time to become familiarised with the key stakeholder interviewees, so my presence felt familiar, and the interviewees felt comfortable. Through reflexivity and the personal reflective account, this research has closed the distance between researcher and participant, which is argued as a strength, evoking greater trust and allowing the interviews to develop into detailed, in-depth textual data (Dowling, 2006). Furthermore, reflexivity assumes a pivotal role in feminist research (King, 1994). The three-method has also ensured that on multiple levels, the researcher was intimately involved in both the process and product of the research (Dowling, 2006). From my own ontological and epistemological understanding, I have been able to identify with the women members of the virtual community and the key stakeholder participants, being aware of the values, beliefs, and perceptions that are influencing the research process, bringing about greater engagement to this research (Sandelowski, 1986).</p>
<p>Issues of anonymity and confidentiality can present problems when presenting findings.</p>	<p>Anonymity was offered to all research participants throughout all three methods. Due to the different methods, I broke down the process to safeguard offline identification and online self-representation to ensure the privacy of all participants and virtual communities.</p>

Main limitations of qualitative research	Addressing the limitations
	<p>Method 1: I identified myself through my own personal account but changed the names of individuals and institutions as appropriate.</p> <p>Method 2: Anonymity was given to all virtual communities, the organisations that took part in the study. All virtual communities had their names changed and were distinguished code numbers. All identifiable knowledge such as partnerships, virtual locations (website, emails, or charity numbers) was kept anonymous. Only with written consent will the locations in which they operate be disclosed, whether they are representatives of a local NGO, INGO, or a larger International Development Agency. Any other approaches and programme knowledge, any other details concerning their structure that may be important to the global analysis of examining pedagogical approaches that are empowering will only be used with written consent.</p> <p>Method 3: All participants were assigned pseudonyms that cannot be linked back to the person, address, or any other form of identification. Only with written consent will the person's job role be disclosed. Real representation will be given to policies discussed, and to countries impacted by policies and government legislation. This research will not use any personal data, as the only focus was experiences with education and empowerment. No other identifiable information was asked or used.</p> <p>This research received ethics approval from the RGC of the Department.</p>
<p>Findings can be more difficult and time-consuming to characterise in a visual way.</p>	<p>The increased acceptance of qualitative research has meant clearer guidelines in presenting. The methodology, methods, and</p>

Main limitations of qualitative research	Addressing the limitations
	<p>Caveats Chapter is presented in a traditional manner, with a methods section clearly stating and justifying how the particular methods and theoretical frameworks were guided by the research questions (Dowling, 2006). Furthermore, the purposive sampling used draws out the characteristics and relevance to the wider population, limiting the difficulty in presenting the findings (Anderson, 2010). Through thematic analysis, the data are colour coded, representing the wider themes relating to empowerment, education, health and wellbeing, and technology, also used in the scoping review and narrative literature review to provide a greater visualisation of the data gathered (Elo and Kyngas, 2008).</p>

However, despite the concern and limitations in using qualitative research, it must be stressed that even in a world where numbers and statistical analysis allow data objectification, some information is better collected, understood, and analysed using a qualitative research method (Campbell, 2014). The overarching aim of this research is to critically examine the pedagogical approaches that facilitate the empowerment of girls and women living in marginalised and rural settings. The idea is to formulate a methodological pathway to empower girls and women living in the context of uneven development; this requires burrowing deep into the lived experiences, which can only be facilitated through a qualitative methodological framework (Austin and Sutton, 2014; Campbell, 2014; Jonker, Pennink, and Bartjan, 2010).

3.6.2 Methodological Framework and Data Collection Methods

This section discusses the methodological framework as shown in Figure 5 Research design, through a range of literary sources weaving in the anthropological premise which underpins the research. In researching the experience of empowerment and education it should be noted that the essence of these experiences is embedded in culture (Kleinman and Benson, 2006). The spectrum of these everyday experiences and relations with policy and practice is captured through this anthropological lens. As argued by Kleinman and Benson (2006, pp.1673-1674):

Anthropologists emphasise that culture is not a single variable but rather comprises multiple variables, affecting all aspects of experience. Culture is inseparable from economic, political, religious, psychological, and biological conditions. Culture is a process through which ordinary activities and conditions take on an emotional tone and a moral meaning for participants.

Figure 6, shows a state of heterogeneousness and movement between experience and exposure. For example, one key stakeholder can hold many experiences within this spectrum as they oscillate between a state of individuality and collectivism.

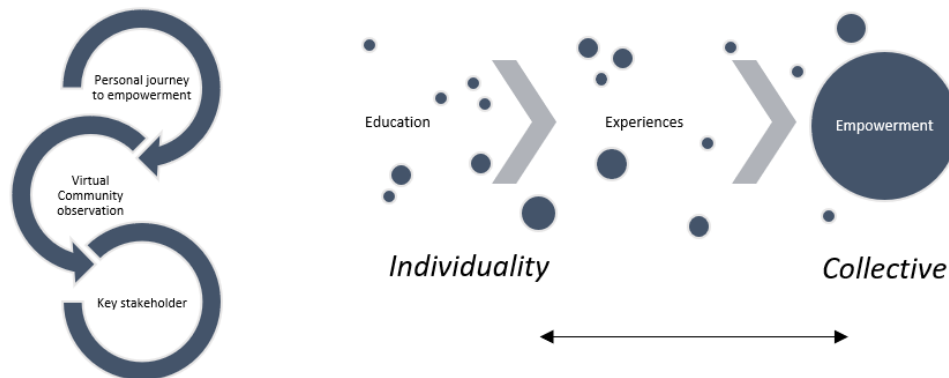


Figure 6 Dynamic nature of experiences.

This section captures the vivacity of experience which is embedded in culture by unravelling the embodiment of meaning of interpersonal relations, religious and spiritual practices, learning experiences, and the key stakeholders' collective and individual identities. This section discusses the eclectic toolbox offered by anthropology through autoethnography and digital ethnography (American Anthropology Association, 2021; Kleinman and Benson, 2006). In addition, this section discusses phenomenology, grounded theory, followed by the methods, and the analytical framework.

3.6.2.1 Ethnography

Ethnography is a technique developed in the 19th century by Western anthropologist and was originally developed as a descriptive account to make sense of cultural values and normative assumptions of non-Western community and culture, complimenting the term 'ethnology' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.2).

The three-method design incorporates the technique of ethnography throughout. The research design flows between autoethnography that is central to

the first of the three-methods, and digital ethnography that is more prominent throughout method stages two and three, whilst retaining the key principles of ethnography that documents patterns of life that give meaning to experience (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Kleinman and Benson, 2006; Kleinman, 1995). As there is no sharp distinction that separates between ethnography, autoethnography, and virtual ethnography, the methodological framework is based on the issues of cultural consumption that relate to learning, empowerment, and wellbeing from a cultural context through the key stakeholder engagement and observation and participation of the virtual community (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The breadth of ethnography and its many multidisciplinary influences that promote qualitative approaches does not take away its value in this research inquiry to overtly participate in a rich virtual community whose women members represent various international organisations working with the empowerment of women and girls. In this engagement process, through ethnography, and its variations, the research has made sense of the impact community has in the personal journeys seeking empowerment and in making sense of cultural values and normative assumptions that shape these very real and lived virtual spaces that are communities (Kleinman, 2006, 1995). An important aspect of the research design is the ability to follow the virtual community members as they experience networking, learning, and empowerment. In this multifaceted process, the expression of who we are as a community and as individual members is intertwined in this complex process of 'becoming' in the context of social relationships. Through this research design, these social negotiations that give expression to empowerment, wellbeing, and learning can be fully explored. Pierre Bourdieu's (1930–2002) work unravels the social context that liberates or restricts, the internalisation of values and norms, and the fundamentals that shape the learning tools that carry and give interpretations of the world (Frömming et al., 2017; Lichterman, 2017; Pink et al., 2016; Varis, 2014; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Carter, 2005). In this same manner, community and individual contexts surface giving way to a co-arising of challenges and situations that influence the empowerment of the key stakeholders (Schipper, 2012; Watts, 1987).

3.6.2.2 Digital Ethnography

In light of the plethora of terminological invocations used by scholars engaged with ethnographic research, on, or through digital platforms, the term 'digital ethnography' encompasses different methodological choices, purporting to be a more inclusive term (Abidin and de Seta, 2020; Murthy, 2008). The ethical research guidelines set out by Schrum (1995) identify virtual communities as social groups, which through the internet develop notable human emotion, frequency, and personal relationships, requiring new tools to master this ethical qualitative research. Furthermore, Schrum (1995) points out an 'obligation' that the researcher has to the virtual community to present themselves authentically. In light of the global pandemic, digital environments are a continuation rather than a rupture to field sites (Hjorth et al., 2017). This naturalness of field settings facilitates an in-depth study of a virtual community in a semi-unstructured format that generates patterns for interpretation through the data analysis (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.3). This exciting digital infrastructure represents a collaborative environment that have a shared epistemology of the humanitarian context of women's and girls' empowerment whilst upholding common goals and values in their quest (Hjorth et al., 2017).

Some of the distinguishable elements of digital ethnography lie in how research data are gathered and the digital formats that play a significant role in the context of participants' everyday life. Carter (2005, p.149) proposes some of the key questions that make part of the ever-growing literature of digital ethnographic studies, inquiring about the relationships formed online and how real life and virtual lives are interwoven regarding lived experiences. These key questions also open for examination on the limitations that lie with digital ethnography and the authenticity of participants. Through the use of a gonzo journalistic analysis and following on from this point regarding capturing the reality of online and the offline realities, which cloud the virtual field, data collection was made possible by an immersion into the virtual community. As argued by Moser (2012, p.88): "Gonzo is also a narrative technique, a form of subjective, participatory literary journalism

that places the narrator in the centre of the narrative while it spontaneously records a dark reality, often fabricated.”

In this crossroad between virtual and offline reality, aspects of ‘race,’ gender, sexuality, privilege, and disability do not disappear in cyberspace (Hjorth et al., 2017; Barratt and Maddox, 2016; Pink et al., 2016; Murthy, 2008). Instead, as Harp and Tremayne (2006, p.249) argue, “The reinforcement of traditional constructions of gender and racial power relations illustrates the conflicting potential and reality of the internet.” A further limitation is my impact as an observing participant and how it may have actively influenced the group and their expression and participation in discussions (Richmond, 2014, p.42). The underlining historical colonial tones to which ethnography has been partial to are also acknowledged and addressed in my reflexive process. The separation of them and us, and the researcher being humble and willing to listen about another culture, draws on my non-Western familial background to address the empiricism within research (Crook and Crang, 1995). Here also lies the importance of borrowing from the indigenous methodological paradigms and earth democracy, rooted in care, where humans are tied with ecological responsibility and economic justice based on the law of return, equal partnerships and respect (Navdanya International, 2021).

3.6.2.3 Autoethnography

The first stage of the research methods is a self-reflective autobiography that explores my personal experience with empowerment within a wider familial, cultural, political, historical, and social context. Autoethnography is an important research method to explore marginalisation, rurality, oppression, and suffering within the context of empowerment. Furthermore, this research moves towards the use of decolonising research methods to address concerns of the portrayal of women living in marginalised and rural context as victims, exposing crucial lessons in their resistance, self-determination and freedom (Williams, 2021). For example, the reports of colonialism in psychological research highlight how black and Latin American people are frequently portrayed through a deficit lens, ignoring their strengths, values, cultural wealth and instead problematising specific groups of people through colonising methodologies (Toldson and Johns, 2016).

There is power in the stories that we share in order to endure, and as we tell these stories they allow us to live better (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011). Autoethnography is an emersion into the stories of ourselves and our families, culture, and political landscape that shape us. Autoethnography is a research method that confronts the notion of the researcher being an outsider to other's perspectives, and through reflexivity, interrogates between the self, society, and politics (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011, p.2). From the start of my PhD journey, I have kept a journal about my learning, noting my frustrations, biases, and self-interrogating thoughts about womanhood, suffering and empowerment. The story of my grandmother and my mother is an evocative narrative that helps answer the question, "Who am I really?" in a form of 'collaborative witnessing;' their stories intertwine with my own as I reflect upon the formation of our womanhood and empowerment. Some of the challenges with autoethnography lie in the emotional exhaustion that occurs when the researcher digs deep into chaotic and traumatising events, by revisiting past experiences (Pearce, 2010). The practice of introspection through journaling, meditation, reading spiritual and philosophical texts, and yoga was fundamental for my engagement with the first of the three-method stage.

3.6.2.4 Phenomenology

As a form of qualitative research, phenomenology is largely philosophical. It allows scholars to learn from the experience of others (Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio, 2019). The virtual element to this research design has allowed for a broader purposive sampling. In understanding the phenomena of empowerment and learning, the first stage of the key informant engagements delves into the lived experience of the key stakeholders and their journey to empowerment. To capture this experience their essence of being and what it is to 'be,' is intricately woven into these stories. The first stage of the key informant interviews emphasised the individual and the meaning to their social reality. The shared experience with the phenomena is described through a phenomenological lens, reducing the experiences lived to their universal essence (Creswell et al., 2007, p.17). Similarly, what is striking about phenomenology as a research method, is that it can tease the person's philosophy as experiential and not as theoretical. Here lies the essence of

the findings to this research inquiry; this approach helped to achieve the aim of the research and the three objectives:

1. To examine the mainstream philosophies, policies, and practices on education and empowerment.
2. To analyse non-mainstream knowledge systems and ancient wisdoms on pedagogical approaches that facilitate empowerment.
3. To formulate a framework to facilitate the empowerment of girls and women in contrast to intervention-based educational approaches.

The essence of these experiences, and not the explanations or analysis (Moustakas, 1994), draws us nearer to understanding what empowerment is, as experienced by women (Kleinman, 1995). For the German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), "Phenomenology refers to knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p.26). Phenomenology as a research method, stressed the similarities of these lived experiences uniting the key stakeholders, rather than dividing due to their differences; "The insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experiences" (Van Manen, 1990, p.78).

The philosophical assumptions that describe a hermeneutic phenomenological research inquiry are interested in the interpretative aspect of the 'texts' of life (*hermeneutic*), as a dynamic interplay between six research activities that consist mainly of:

- Discovering the phenomenon of interest.
- Reflecting on the essential themes.
- Underlying what constitutes the nature of these lived experiences.
- Writing a description of the phenomenon through an interpretative process.
- Meditating between the different meanings of the lived experiences.

- Grasping the essential meaning of the phenomenon.

(Van Manen, 1990, p.26)

The ultimate purpose of imparting a phenomenological reflection to women's experience is to understand the experience as lived. This permits the pedagogical essence of a particular experience and not as a professional researcher or phenomenologist, but as a woman also making sense of empowerment. The challenges that come with using phenomenology as a research method is in the complexity of grasping the multidimensionality of phenomena (Van Manen, 1990, p.78). The universality of the essence of phenomena does not fit into a neat description; it is the structure of meaning from the text, the units and themes that hold the essence of the phenomena (Creswell et al., 2007; Van Manen, 1990, p.78).

The need to impart a feminist, Buddhist and Marxist lens is because under phenomenology the social context only becomes important as an expression of the individual experience, which is part of the mundane, the everyday world. This limitation was considered and minimised by observing and participating in a virtual community that constituted part of these women's broader social and community landscape using digital ethnography. The methodological principles of phenomenology struggle to explain power's impact and imposing world views on participants, highlighting phenomenology's philosophical origins. With this micro-lens, identity is something that will be highlighted, which is understood as the individual making sense of empowerment.

3.6.2.5 Grounded Theory

An essential part of the research objectives is to create a methodological pathway that facilitates the empowerment of women and girls who have experienced marginality and rurality. The methodological framework imparts a usefulness through grounded theory, designed to be of 'use' to develop theories that can be applied in real life situations (Oktay, 2013). The thread of empowerment is encrusted throughout the research design and learning; it is not merely the phenomenon studied, but both operationalised by the key stakeholders and the researcher and theoretical framework. Corley and Carey (2015) argue that

grounded theory methodology provides room for adaptation and creativity in its implementation, precisely because it can facilitate the production of informative insights. Glaser and Strauss (1967) provide a methodological guide; the research uses an inductive process to develop a methodological pathway that provides insight and understanding into how education facilitates empowerment throughout the three-method process.

In this qualitative methodological framework, grounded theory is used as both a methodology and a method (Turner and Astin, 2021). The framework of principles that underpin this research is a research openness. Grounded theory complements this approach together with critical methods and indigenous methodology, as it takes on an inductive approach to data, facilitating the generation of theory. From a method lens, grounded theory is used by developing codes and memos in the data analysis (Turner and Astin, 2021). Due to the chequered history of grounded theory, there is a disjointed approach and few practical examples of grounded theory in use in the literature (Sbaraini et al., 2011). The evolution of grounded theory and its epistemological underpinnings have not been linear and can be mapped into four stages with a fifth emerging (see Table 2),

Table 2 Evolution of grounded theory and its epistemological underpinnings (Sbaraini et al., 2011, p.2).

Stages	Original authors
Stages one and two: Classic grounded theory	Barney Glaser, Anselm Strauss, and Julie Corbin
Stages three and four: Constructivist Grounded Theory	Kathy Charmaz and Adele Clarke
Stage five (emerging): Dimensional Analysis	Leonard Schatzman

Grounded theory as a methodology has facilitated the examination of how people have journeyed through to empowerment. At the heart of this methodology and method lies the premise that we *do not know* (Sbaraini et al., 2011). In this, grounded theory supports the overall theoretical framework to this research design, which incorporates non-Western philosophies. The Hindu sciences discusses this *Shoonya* – no-thing or no-thingness: “As the life that you are, you have a choice: either you can be a small creature in the vase of emptiness, or you can be that emptiness which is the source of all creation” (Sadhguru, 2021, p.31). In the theoretical analysis of the three-method process, there are aspects of the unknown which are present in the everyday experience of the phenomena.

3.6.2.6 Critical Buddhist Theory

It is in the same vein of seeking what pedagogical approaches empower women and girls that the methodological framework draws on critical Buddhist theory. Research can be defined as “an activity that involves finding out, in a more, or less systematic way, things you did not know” (Walliman, 2011, p.7). In this hegemony of Western influence on research, the systematic investigation to search for the truth through continuous questioning and observation by Buddha is overlooked, and philosophers such as Socrates of the same period are more closely associated with the origins of research (Laksiri, 2016). There are many lessons that can be drawn from Buddha and Buddhist teaching and its grasp of knowledge and systematic research, in prominent fields of psychology, sociology, ecology, politics and governance, education, and health (Laksiri, 2016; Schipper, 2012; Nauriyal, Drummond, and Lal, 2006; Henning, 2002). There is an operational aspect to this research which meets one of the objectives of this thesis to propose a framework that can be used and adapted for engaging with women and girls. The proposed framework is adaptable to both non-Western and Western societies. In support of this objective, critical Buddhist theory brings forth a two-fold process, to understand, *dukkha* (human suffering), and the second element is *magga* (to overcome that suffering) (Laksiri, 2016; Schipper, 2012). Although enshrouded in a deep spiritual and religious sense of liberation, the premise to distinguish what is not, critical Buddhist theory provides a methodological pathway to overcome

suffering, offering an exemplary approach to research (Laksiri, 2016; Schipper, 2012). Research from a Western lens is like a knife in the sense that it cuts. It is sharp in its critique, and this is, of course, useful, but as this research looks beyond a critique to mainstream education and into an emerging methodological framework, it needs a methodological pathway that permits an adaptation of knowledge from the data (Schipper, 2012).

This qualitative methodological research design draws on the Buddhist principle of the theory of *catvāri-ārya-satyāni*, the Four Noble Truths, which is one of the fundamental and nuclear Buddhist teachings (Fung Key, 2011, p.158);

1. *duḥkha* or *duḥkha-satya* – Suffering or nature of Suffering
2. *samudaya* or *samudaya-satya* – Cause of Suffering
3. *nirodha* or *nirodha-satya* – Ceasing of Suffering
4. *mārga* or *mārga-satya* – Path of Ceasing of Suffering

The use of critical Buddhist theory has also influenced the pedagogical approach of my own post graduate experience. The supervision style which has guided this research has strong elements of Buddhist pedagogy. Much like the Buddha's own pedagogical style, there has been a holistic emphasis in the teaching on a psychological, emotional, mental, and spiritual level (Kariyawasam, 2014; Schipper, 2012). The culmination of this teaching style has infused the methodological framework to connect both heart and mind in this inquiry.

A further element of critical Buddhist theory and its influence in this research methodology, lies in the Buddhist doctrine of *paṭicca samuppāda* (independent co-arising) (Schipper, 2012). In drawing out a methodological framework that allows for the inquiry into a research question that delves into the experiences of non-Western women, the linear notions of empowerment and progress are not adequate to understand the intricacies of these stakeholders' complex settings. From a Buddhist ethics lens, "Reality appears as an interdependent process wherein change and choice, dower and deed, person and community are mutually causative" (Macy, 1979, p.38).

3.6.2.7 Indigenous Theory

Although this research methodology discusses the move away from a normative colonial research framework through its research design, it does not explicitly enter the sphere of decolonising methodology. Rather, the use of indigenous theory stems from the findings of the scoping review and the narrative literature review. The power imbalance that dominates mainstream education is reflected in the misplaced premise that within indigenous and rural women and communities there lies an absence of knowledge (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2019). This motivated a narrative literature review into the ancient wisdom that supports indigenous knowledge and way of being, including practices and rituals (Ryser, 2012). From this stem the legitimacy in using both indigenous theory and an indigenous methodology to widen the scope in the inquiry over whether education empowers women and girls from non-Western societies. Blending further into these method with critical Buddhist theory, for the embodiment of knowledge (Laksiri, 2016; Schipper, 2012). The use of stakeholders rather than interview participants and the strict application of methodology and methods set a division which perpetuates a colonial thinking (Nickson et al., 2011; Juliá and Kondrat, 2005). In this non-duality, which calls on oneness and interconnectedness, flows the three-method process. “Within indigenous ways-of-knowing, in being, knowledge is inseparable from the relationships with/ in the place from which it emerges” (Higgins and Kim, 2019). Elements of indigenous theory and methodology blend into the theoretical analysis and methods, bringing in an equal partnership and inclusivity throughout the methodological framework.

3.7 Recruiting Participants

3.7.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Participants were qualified using inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 3. This research only includes female participants. The research has an international reach, due to the use of digital ethnography, which enabled the inclusion of participants from all geographical locations, belonging to any race or ethnicity. Participants under the age of 18 were excluded, as elected participants

needed to have a standing in matters relating to policy, and a breadth of experiences relating to empowerment and education, to give a rich and detailed account of such. Participants were not excluded based on social condition, sexual preference, faith, or disability, or on the level of formal education; participants with non-formal or informal learning could be included. The same applied to formal employment or experience regarding policy matters. All participants were active in the empowerment of girls and women, with a strong engagement and understanding of policy matters. As method three was policy oriented, representation from international development agencies like the UN, INGOs, local NGOs, and education and empowerment initiatives were sought. Each virtual community was identified by their professional engagement in issues of development for girls and women. They were professional bodies representative of international NGOs, local NGOs, or international development agencies.

Table 3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

INCLUSION	
PERSONAL ACCOUNT	Individual transformative experiences Narratives of mother and grandmother’s transformative experiences relevant to my own learning and empowerment
	Formal education experience
	Non-formal education experience
	Informal education experience
VIRTUAL COMMUNITY	Virtual communities that represent local NGOs
	Virtual communities that represent INGOs
	All geographical operations and locations
	Virtual communities with women only participants
	All faiths and cultural background
	Virtual communities that represent large international development agencies, such as the UN, World Bank etc.
	Virtual communities that have inbuilt support mechanisms
	Virtual communities and participants that focus on the empowerment of girls and women, education, health, and wellbeing
KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS	Participants involved in policy matters regarding girls’ and women’s empowerment
	All sexual orientations
	Participants above the age of 25
	Participants who speak English fluently
	Participants who represent the Global South
	Participants who have experience with formal, non-formal, and informal education
	Participants who have a non-Western cultural background
	Participants who have a deep understanding of conflict, disaster, marginality, and rurality from a personal and a professional capacity
	Participants who have a willingness to share in-depth accounts of empowerment
EXCLUSION	
ALL STAGES	Male participants
	Anyone below the age of 18
	Virtual communities that meet less than once a month
	Inactive virtual communities with inactive members
	Virtual communities with less than five members
	Knowledge: participants without a good level of knowledge of policies around health, wellbeing, and empowerment
	Participants who do not work in the areas of female empowerment and development
	Non-English speaking
	Individuals who failed to provide consent

3.8 Practical Experiences on the Research Process

This research deals with large quantities of textual data belonging to the ethnographic account, community emersion and interview transcripts. There is a broadness to the research question as it has a focus on experience which makes it well suited to thematic analysis (Smith, 2015). The practical details to the coding process, the step process of thematic analysis and the review of themes are carried out within a qualitative *paradigm*. The initial research process adopted an organic approach to coding and theme development from the beginning that was facilitated by the ethnographic chapter. My unique standpoint of researcher became an immersive, fluid engagement process with the data (Smith, 2015, p. 223). The approach taken was inductive without the use of a code book or a coding frame applied to the data (Javadi and Zarea, 2016).

The step-by-step process used in conducting thematic analysis included the familiarization of data, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes and the presentation of themes. This broad guide originally developed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2022) was adapted during my research process and used as a starting point, the detailed process is discussed below:

1. Step One: The Familiarization of Data through Preparation

The preparation phase of the research began with the autoethnographic account. This process started with a reflective exercise that began at the early stages of the PhD process. I began to journal feelings, questions, mental blockages, and uncertainties that would arise either from supervision discussion or through my continuous engagement with literature. Creating a space which allowed me to understand myself better was the foundation to the ethnographic piece (Campbell, 2016). This first research method required an emersion on memory. Although there was already a familiarization to this data as it was the story of my mother, grandmother, and me, it required a stepping back and a re-introduction as researcher able to connect with the narrative but also analyse the text as

data. Whilst this process was underway, my observation and participation of the virtual community was also taking place. The dynamics of this community were all happening through expressions, unsaid words, awkward silences, sighs, and physical expressions that could not be captured through transcripts. In this, the constant attendance of these meetings was the familiarization of data captured using a gonzo journalistic approach. In terms of the key stakeholder engagements, this was a straightforward approach. I arranged for short introduction meetings with every participant before commencing the engagement process. The fifteen-minute introductions were recorded, providing familiarity to the following two engagements.

Making sense of the data

Before the data for the first research method process was uploaded on to software programme Nvivo, I spent months of editing text and reviewing the draft chapter with my supervisors. This required a constant familiarization of the text and a re-reading of the data. After the chapter was approved the document was uploaded. The key stake engagements were transcribed directly onto Nvivo. This programme was used throughout all of the research process to help manage the data (Cavanagh, 1997). All the interviews were transcribed on one document. Furthermore, playing back the recording and simultaneously transcribing allowed me to make sense of the data. I opened two distinct data files, one for the ethnographic chapter and the second for all the key stake holder transcripts.

The Emergence of Grounded theory through Memo Writing

Memo writing was an important part that bridged the first stage of familiarisation and preparation with the coding process (Mohajan and Mohajan, 2022). As the interviews were being played and or the ethnographic chapter read out, I used the memo tool in Nvivo to record my thinking. I highlighted sentences and sometimes paragraphs that captured meaning and underlying concepts that needed to be recorded. Memo writing was used as an analytical strategy which ultimately supported the

trustworthiness of the research process, allowing to achieve a truthful interpretation of the data (Mohajan and Mohajan, 2022). Continuity of the data was achieved through *memoing*. This gave flexibility to record and link similarities, opinions and judgements that came to me as I engaged with a particular data set. As argued by Mohajan and Mojajan (2022), *memoing* is a pivotal transitional analytical process between data collection and the drafting of the theory. The memos captured rich analytical detail that fell sometimes between the lines of our conversations.

Organising phase through Open Coding

The open coding process was a thorough exercise. I carefully went through every sentence, pausing the recording and highlight phrases in different colours that corresponded to different codes as they jumped out from the text. The open coding process was the initial categorisation of themes. At this stage the codes described and began to group ideas, feelings, and experiences that loosely related to the research question and sub questions. Once this process was completed, I had a good understanding of the emerging findings and commonalities between the data sets and the main points that were recurring throughout the data.

Grouping

Once I had in my respective data files coded all the text, I grouped the codes together. Patterns began to emerge, which was the beginning of the theme development. Within this process there was an organic review of the codes that took place. I began to analyse the data to find similar codes, I then moved them together condensing the codes and eliminating additional codes that conveyed the same patterns. This can only take place once you have the whole data set coded and a view of all the recurring patterns. Regarding the second data file (key stakeholder engagements) as more interviews were being transcribed onto the Nvivo document the organic process of grouping or creating new codes as it emerged from the data was taking place.

2. Generating Themes

Themes represented emerging patterns that are broader than codes. Continuing from the grouping phase, the codes were fitted under broader umbrella terms (themes). This then allowed for other codes that did not appear much or irrelevant to be discarded. There were codes that were prominent enough that became themes in their own right, and below those other descriptive thematic codes could be fitted. This process took the shape of storytelling (Smith, 2015). As the codes began to fit into a thematic order one could begin to devise a common story between the data sets.

Reviewing Themes through Categorisation

The experience of education and the link between education and health was an important thread throughout the themes. Whilst reviewing the themes and tightening of the categorisation the intricacies of patterns emerged. This review process enabled rich detail about the pedagogical experiences that empowered these women. Furthermore, it became a lot easier to infer relationships between the transcripts.

3. Defining and Naming Themes

Once the themes were established and similar to the grouping stage of the open coding, a review against the data set took place. Although this practical guide is presented in numerical order, the process was in fact cyclical by nature. I returned to the data and compared the themes ensuring that the themes were an accurate representation of the data. During this process I engaged in working discussion with my supervisors to review and name and define the themes.

4. Thematic Models

The core purpose in using thematic analysis is to distinguish patterns within the data guided by the research question(s). In the thematic models that are presented the thematic model that is used systematically is a thematic mind map approach delineating the relationship of the codes and the themes and how they fit together to tell a story.

3.9 Analytical Framework and Research Method Justification

The methodology chapter has so far presented the research design and discussed the methodology and methods used. This section provides a justification to how the methods come together and why they were used. Phenomenology, grounded theory, feminist theory, critical Buddhist theory and indigenous theory make part of the research design's theoretical and analytical framework. There are many facets that belong to the experience of the key stakeholders, the virtual community members, and the lives of me my grandmother and mother regarding education, empowerment, health, and wellbeing. These phenomena are in constant motion with the political, social, cultural, and spiritual interactions that surround us. Similarly, there is no hard or fast rule as to how the methodologies and methods come together. Rather, the research looks at acknowledging the ethnocultural diversity of this research through the various tools available (Mohanty, 2007). The vein of methodological pluralism runs deep through this research design (Slife and Gantt, 1999). The underlining method of this research is observation (Bernard, 2002). In this a phenomenological approach was present throughout and was applied more stringent in the key stakeholder engagements. The individual essence analysed needed to be supported by Feminist, Marxist, Buddhist, Indigenous theory, and methodology to employ an empowerment praxis. In addition, the key stakeholders are women of the world. There are intersectional layers to their experience that needed to be captured. For example, the power structures and cultural and societal norms that dictated much of what they 'should', 'could' and 'would do' are important elements to their experience and journey that are disregarded unless it enriches the subjective reality (Qutoshi, 2018). And although the theoretical framework of this research borrows phenomenology as a philosophy, the research design needed to be expanded to capture the chaos, uncertainty, and external factors that encroach on the everyday experience of a phenomena. The emancipatory stance to this research and research question is the breadth to which facilitates a deeper understanding of challenges as an important finding that embodies an instrumental learning experience and realisation process.

Within this research design, the three-method process provides a systematic rigour to research that does not follow a strict methodological approach (Foster, 1997).

Objectivity is the simultaneous realisation of as much reliability and validity as possible. Reliability is the degree to which the finding is independent of accidental circumstances of the research, and validity is the degree to which the finding is interpreted in a correct way (Kirk and Miller, 1986, p.20).

The research is founded on first-hand experiences, dedicating a first part interview to their journey towards empowerment. This was paramount to understanding the inequities present in women's journeys towards empowerment. The learning provided the tools to become empowered captured through digital ethnography and aspects of phenomenology, grounded theory, and indigenous methodology that culminated in the methodological framework used in this research inquiry. The ethos of the research design is to study the phenomena of education and empowerment in natural settings and interpret meanings people bring to them (Flick, 2007). This summarises the initial trajectory of the research design that encompasses the inquiry process into the ontological assumptions of empowerment, womanhood, and being. In addition, the epistemological assumptions, and the axiology that encumbers the inclusion of values are central concepts to the methodology that is born from these theoretical assumptions (Cresswell et al., 2007, p.238).

The previous section discusses the diversity and breadth of experiences represented by the key stakeholders and the global reach of the virtual community, through digital technology. The considerable disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic on travel and in-person field research meant the project design and research questions had to be adapted to the travel restrictions. The research design opted for a virtual ethnographic design and digital technology to carry out the key stakeholder engagements. The immersion through online platforms and the use of gonzo journalism emphasise the closeness of ethnography and the travelling to and from the digital field (Bengtsson, 2014). This creative element of the research

design continues to uphold the primary ethos of qualitative research centred on opening attitudes to understanding the experience of phenomena through the experience of others (Austin and Sutton, 2014). Through digital platforms like 'Zoom' and 'Google-meets' – (video conferencing platforms), the ability to engage deeply with these key stakeholders was made possible.

The analytical framework of this research design weaves through many aspects of the methodological approach. The use of thematic analysis as the chosen method of analysis demands a small number of participants that can offer this depth and insight (The University of Auckland, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2008). In addition to knowledge and experience, through the ongoing observation of and participation in the virtual community, different members displayed a keenness and willingness to express and articulate their understanding of the phenomenon of interest in a reflective manner (Bernard, 2002). Through purposeful sampling, and the two-stage key informant engagement process, there has been a rich narration of their lives, familial struggles, and lessons learnt followed by discussions of the phenomena of interest from a policy perspective. Furthermore, the theoretical freedom offered by thematic analysis allows for scope to provide a rich and detailed account of data by 'thematising meanings' (Braun and Clarke, 2008). Guided by the research question and sub-questions, patterned responses and meanings within the data set have been captured through thematic analysis, accompanied by prevalence across the entire data set (Braun and Clarke, 2008).

The beginning of this thesis focused on examining modern theories of development, modern theories of anthropology, sociology, modern theories of conflict transformation, and empowerment. However, as the thesis unfolded through the scoping review, a gap in knowledge highlighted a need to look beyond these modern theories to understand the relationship between education and empowerment in a manner that satisfied the findings from the scoping review (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2019; Seeberg, 2014; Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013; Shah, 2011). The grounding of this thesis is drawn from the narrative literature review's findings and the adaptability of and necessity to include ancient

wisdom, traditional pedagogical approaches, and the essence of liberation and freedom that is central to Buddhism, Hinduism, Ubuntu, Daoism and Ancient Mayan philosophies, together with the grounding of anthropological and sociological theory. Thus, this thesis is embodying the same principles it is arguing through its presentation, methodological framework, and methods. The journey so far has been an empowering pedagogical experience (Williams, 2021). In addition to thematic analysis, there is a strong feminist analysis that draws on feminist theory and is a concurrent part of the three-method process. The heart of this research draws on the experiences of women and addresses the power imbalances that are endemic to their individual settings and those cultural, social, and political contexts that have shaped their experiences of empowerment, learning, and wellbeing. Similarly on a macro level, the virtual community itself, its members, and the key stakeholders are representatives of a move to tackle gender discrimination. In using intersectional feminist theory as a lens of analysis, the issues around subordination that are socially constructed are examined in the research findings (Sterk, 2018). With the adoption of an inclusive analytical framework, the experiences of women of colour and non-Western women can be understood away from the dominant white Western feminist theory that imparts a narrow understanding of women's experience as being tied to marketplace participation (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, 2019). As argued by Sterk (2018, p.3):

Women of colour also conduct strong analyses of race and gender that balance on the knife-edge of feminist theory. While feminist theory brought women to the forefront, it often kept women of colour in the background by ignoring race and ethnicity. Keenly aware of feminist theory and scholarship's ability to highlight women's issues, as well as its omission of race and ethnicity, scholars of colour resisted feminist theory as totalising and criticised feminist scholarship as incomplete.

This research deviates in style during the second stage of the method process. The virtual community observation and participation uses a gonzo journalistic approach and analysis. Gonzo journalism is a style of reporting that closes the gap between the journalist as an observer reporting on events (Hoover,

2009). The virtual community observation was inundated with the everyday workings of a community, the logistics, the administrative, and professional workings of Zoom meetings. From analysis of the data collected, it became apparent that the depth of the analysis was taking place beyond the interactions. What made these virtual gatherings into a community was the interactions between members, like the power dynamics, the awkward silences, the bursts of expression that surged in the greetings. In the light of this, a gonzo journalistic approach and adaptation to the analytical framework brought in the vivid depictions of the events experienced through a subjective process (Hoover, 2009). In this proposed analytical framework, what joins the various theories and ensures a complimentary blend is inclusivity in the differences not just between the stage method process but the key stakeholders in these stages.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The research was granted ethics approval by the University of York's Department of Health Sciences Research Governance Committee (HSRGC) on the 16th of November 2020 (See Appendix E). To apply to ethical practices, all three of the method processes have clear protocols in place for handling sensitive data and dealing with issues of data management; anonymity of data was ensured and also data confidentiality. The key stakeholders occasionally discussed sensitive topics during sessions. Personal reflections on their journeys to seek empowerment through education sessions were also discussed during engagements. The semi-structured questions were not intrusive, nor did they centre on the women's personal lives or issues. However, the questions had a strong focus that related to education, empowerment, and wellbeing. If sensitive topics emerged, the research focused on the strategies used to overcome challenges.

The consent form and project information sheets were given in advance of the first scheduled meet and greet meeting. Furthermore, it is important to note that the women participating in the personal interviews were members of women's groups with a support network that they were a part of; these groups have inbuilt support mechanisms.

All electronically stored data, such as interview recordings, interview transcripts, and observational notes, are stored on the University of York secure cloud storage (Google Drive). The electronic transfer of data is password-secure in an encrypted file. The data will not be shared or transferred to others at the University of York or to any other institution or organisation. All audio recordings were transferred to my secure laptop and to an encrypted folder on the university's secure cloud storage. Data were also transferred to the data management system Nvivo, which is also password secure. The only email address used was my university email address. All temporarily stored data were password protected and encrypted. I used Bitlocker, recommended by the university, to protect personal data and confidential information on my personal laptop Windows device. Strong passwords were used to reinforce the encryption security.

Anonymity was offered to all research participants throughout all three methods. Due to the different methods, the ethical considerations for this research safeguarded offline identification and online self-representation to ensure the privacy of all participants and virtual communities. Participants were identified in the reporting of this PhD through their organisations (i.e., UNICEF, UN Women, etc) or other networks. Data from engagements identifies participants through pseudonyms and their organisational names are generalised –i.e., UN, INGO, etc.

3.11 Reflexivity and Positionality

I would not consider myself a likely candidate for a PhD. I say this in relation to the limited opportunities that exist to refugee children (Hutchinson and Reader, 2021). From a systems view, there are barriers that are not perceivable to the policy makers and its institutions (Hutchinson and Reader, 2021). And although it may appear that there is a formidable playing field and the access to free education is available to all, there are a host of opportunities that fail to match the context of the child and their family. As argued in my ethnographic chapter on page 274 the cultural displacement is a vast and arid landscape that includes learning. Whilst I played catch up and slowly learnt to navigate the British system the luxuries of choosing, deciding for oneself and being encouraged to know who you are and your

experience as a first-generation Colombian immigrant were unexplored. In examining my positionality in relation to this research, being 'the other' are worthy of exploration regarding my interest on issues of women's empowerment, wellbeing and education (Foote and Bartell, 2011). From a feminist scholastic perspective, positionality is defined as the praxis between an individual's worldview that encumbers a critical knowing of the dynamics in location, experience, and perspective (Foote and Bartell, 2022). Positionality as such is not a fixed and sees the interplay of the social, political and experiential that influence the position taken within a research study. In this, the first part to this section addresses the important question of 'where I am coming from?' (Holmes, 2020). In this my gender, values, faith, geographical locations, race, social class, status and ethnicity all shaped the research and key findings (Struckmann, 2018; Kral, Covarrubias and Iturribarría, 2012).

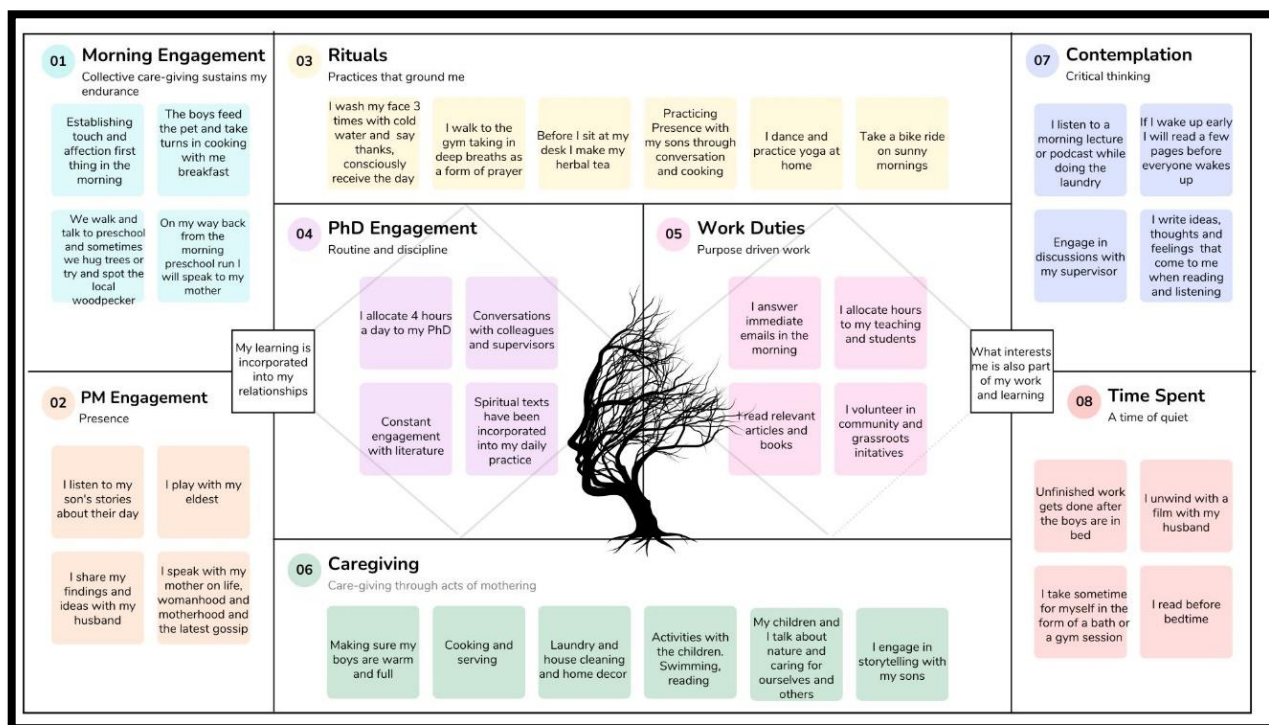
As the young daughter of a house cleaner at the time, I grew accustomed to ask permission. I spent many afternoons of my childhood in the houses of 'white' upper-class people, seeing my mother clean (page 271). On many occasions I too helped so that we could leave quickly. And, although they were kind, it made a distinction between our status, both legal and social, and that of race. A PhD accomplishment would be more assuming of a family of Oxford graduates that were well connected than a daughter a house cleaner. In many of the key stakeholder narratives they too discuss their experience of 'othering', displacement, separation, and a subjugation to a system, situation, or upper class. My background provides many positive elements of ethics and skills in interacting with women from diverse backgrounds and experiences. (Murphy and Dingwall, 2007). I further argue that these experiences strengthened my intersectional feminist lens and only positively impacted my research without creating negative bias. For example, the apparent contradictions (page 400) that are viewed by Western feminists regarding caring duties, collective household dynamics, supporting family members, and fleeing violence as experiences of vulnerable women would have been contrary to the research findings.

One of the main reflective elements from this section is that I am a woman from the Global South coming from a collective culture. Box 01 looks at a day in my

PhD journey and illustrates the collective nature of my every day. From morning to evening I am engaged with my family, which includes members of my extended family. I share what is happening in my professional life with as much ease as I do my private life. I do not resent the care that I give others or view that as a duty. Regardless of my position as a researcher and a working professional, my caring roles like motherhood are too fundamental aspects of my womanhood (Kleinman, 2020).

My day is full, and many things are happening simultaneously without any compartmentalisation. Box 01 depicts the business and motion with a figure of a tree in the shape of a profile. The figure of a tree symbolises the enriching and grounding practices that make part of my day to day and is a symbol of care from an Asian and Latin American cultural perspective. In this, I continue to retain similar rituals that I have learned from my mother and grandmother. For example, prayer, and although I have adapted this practice is an important aspect to my day to day. Rather, than conflict, what supports my endurance to withstand the pressures of work and life are precisely what has been commoditised – *care* (Shiv, 1999). My shared commonalities with the key stakeholders and their collective experience have broadened my worldview to recognise the empowerment in these women - (Adichie, 2015).

Box 01 A day in my PhD journey.



I have since 2015 engaged in grass-root initiatives primarily in Uganda and Colombia. In some way or another, community involvement has always been at the centre of these programmes and in that, women from these communities have been the spearheads. My involvement in these projects provide a continued hands-on experience with issues of empowerment, education, food, keeping me connected to concepts of mutual aid, humility and reciprocity that are relevant and important to my research (Solnit, 2009). From an ethical consideration, the principle of Do No Harm sets a foundational level to which research needs to comply with (Charangle and Lucchi, 2018). Otherwise, the invisibility that dominant power structures actively play in imposing the vulnerability paradigm on women continues to be replicated. The methodological framework draws on decolonial methodologies together with Marxists and Feminist theory as concurrent throughout the research design (Struckmann, 2018; Kral, Covarrubias and Iturribarría, 2012).

3.11.1 Exploration of Tensions

This section explores the tensions in the PhD. The narrative literature review conducted (Chapter 5), introduces the theoretical and philosophical relevance to Southern epistemologies. The tension in this lies with a PhD that is written to fit Northern contexts and norms. Although on the surface there appears to be a divide between North and South, the Southern epistemologies that ground this thesis explore the commonalities that unite us as human. In this, using the eclectic method and methodologies to anthropological research the mediating factors with Southern epistemologies written and presented in a Northern context reside in the de-colonial approach taken in this research that draws the resistance and narratives of the key stakeholders of this research (Varis, 2014). The research design has achieved a reconciliation and an innovative approach to working with both Western centric, Indigenous and de-colonial methodologies showing an innovative approach to research that does not further divide between epistemologies (Datta, 2017).

Another tension is this PhD is the Western research protocol followed despite a critique of Western mainstream education. Before expanding upon this emerging tension, it is important to note that this PhD is not an individual effort but a collective achievement. Without my mother, grandmother, and key stakeholders there would be no PhD. Educational attainment within the Western mainstream tradition is directed at individual achievement (Schneider and Hutt, 2014). This PhD has acted contrary to the Western normative framework by incorporating a collective approach to academia. Rather than a discussion on unresolved tensions, this section acknowledges these tensions and mediates by embodying what the thesis is proposing within its theoretical and conceptual frameworks. In this, I invite the reader to look beyond me as the sole researcher and trace the achievement of this PhD to that of my grandmother, and mother as well. The restricted formal education that was offered to my grandmother and her persistence despite her father's prohibition to attend school is a mark of determination (page 238). A further point, that needs to be discussed in relation to this tension is the premise on formal mainstream education as the ultimate education. One of the key findings that emerged from this thesis was the significance of informal learning and the

interconnected importance of traditional knowledge systems and ancient wisdom. The premise that formal education empowers women is rejected in this thesis. The research findings from the key stakeholder engagements shows us that the realisation to empowerment is a complex web of learning experiences that are not confined to schooling (Freire, 1972). Similarly, the ability to reflect on difficult memories did not subject me to trauma. Neither due to those experiences do I consider myself a victim. The familial approaches used by the women before me to manage their challenging circumstances is a blueprint to how I developed, coped, and learnt. Those approaches involved religion, prayer, compassion, resistance, and endurance. Informal learning is an ongoing process that envelops the individual constantly. Its invisible structure makes it difficult to measure or quantify. It is precisely why 'presence and engagement' were instrumental in understanding the educational landscapes of the key stakeholders (Kleinman, 2020, 2017).

From a positionality standpoint, the methodological framework harbours a resistance against the structures that confine women's voices; these are the same structures that prevent us from researching in authentic manners (King, 1994). This methodology chapter ruptures this stance.

As a researcher, the broader paradigms that form the basic categories of inquiry for this research are influenced by the paradigms of pragmatism, advocacy, and participation, and the indigenous belief system that incorporates earth democracy:

The researcher and the social world impact on each other, facts and values are not distinct, and findings are inevitably influenced by the researcher's perspective and values...[and] the methods of natural science are not appropriate because the social world is not governed by law-like regularities but is mediated through meaning and human agency.

(Snape and Spencer, 2003, p.17).

Researchers who come from a pragmatist worldview hold that there is a blend between ontology and epistemology (Munhall, p.4). Knowing is in doing and experiencing, and consequently, truth is the manifestation of what is known at that time—this positions knowledge in a constant motion that evolves through

experience (Butler-Kisber, 2018). This is particularly useful in the policy and practice aspect that the key informant engagements deal with (Kelly, 2020). The indigenous worldview focuses on the relationship with the community, bringing a respectful and inclusive research portrayal of the experiential and embodiment of being in storying as a research method (Kovach, 2018, pp.223–227). From the pragmatist and indigenous perspectives, the notion that knowledge is experience based on storying is an important category of inquiry to adopt as a broad paradigm in this research, as education is understood in its broadest context to encompass experience, values, and morals that culminate both the researcher and participants lived experience.

3.12 Conclusion

This chapters discusses extensively the methodological framework, the methods and caveats that blend in the carving of a research design that facilitates answering the research questions and meeting the aim and objectives of the thesis. The women who have taken part in this research, including myself, have different degrees of experiences with marginality, discrimination, rurality, and poverty. Through these complex contexts, the research design permits the capture of the totality of these experiences in a manner which evokes humility and equal partnership (Schipper, 2012). Through a disempowerment looking glass, women’s narratives that are interwoven with trauma, suffering, and challenges are interpreted at a distance. The gap between researcher and participant prevents engagement and presence that contributes to co-learning and co-creating (Kleinman, 2020, 2017). The three-method process that begins with an autoethnographic account of my story, captures a nakedness in all our narratives combined that bare empowerment learning and wellbeing as an experience that is full of challenges. In the use of critical Buddhist theory and indigenous methodology and theory, the engagement proposed is one of respect and reciprocal learning (Ryder, *et al.*, 2020; Higgins and Kim, 2019; Knudson, 2015; Smith Linda Tuhiwai, 2012).

This chapter presents a methodological framework and methods adapted to challenge hierarchy in research and presents a fusion of Western and non-Western methodologies and methods. Sitting on the fringes of a non-colonial approach to research. The research design was an initiation to a methodological pathway for understanding how to facilitate empowerment through research.

The next five chapters that precede the methodology chapter are the Scoping Review (Chapter 4), Narrative Literature Review (Chapter 5), Autoethnographic Account (Chapter 6), Virtual Community Observation and Participation (Chapter 7), and Key Stakeholder Engagement (Chapter 8). These chapters are analysing the emerging findings and actively link and weave in an emphasis on health sciences and wellbeing. The analytical points that emerge from these chapters are critically discussed in the Discussion and Recommendations (Chapter 9), which point towards a recommended framework to facilitate empowerment through education.

4 Scoping Review: Educational Approaches that Facilitate Empowerment

Equal educational opportunity is, indeed, both a desirable, and a feasible goal, but to equate this with obligatory schooling is to confuse salvation with the Church.

(Ivan Illich, 1926 – 2002)

4.1 Introduction

Education is positioned as the equaliser to the inequalities brought about by our modern frameworks. As argued by Illich (1978), our ‘modernisation of poverty’ has eroded our understanding of self-reliance and wellbeing. Empowerment through education is obscured by the formalisation of how we learn (Illich, 1970). A scoping review and mapping of literature were required to map the pedagogical approaches that facilitate empowerment from the perspective of girls and women. The study method adopted a robust search methodology on academic databases and relevant grey literature, to collect research articles and policy reviews that adhered to the desired inclusion criteria of the population of interest, phenomena of interest, and settings of interest.

The findings reveal an international consensus of shared experience between women folk on education and empowerment. The scoping review outlines three theme classifications. Ten emergent themes relating to empowering pedagogical approaches, one theme on disempowering pedagogical approaches, and eight sub-themes. To conclude, the final classification discusses two emerging themes. Furthermore, this study aims to inform policymakers on the pertinent issues of health by also addressing the disempowering aspects to education. The paternalistic approach of development programmes further limits the ability of girls and women to harness empowerment for their wellbeing by restricting their expansion of voice and agency (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999).

This scoping review critically examines knowledge from contemporary literature from the year 2000 onwards taking into account global technological developments which have impacted on education during this period (Garside, 2014). The modernisation of the current mainstream education system compels a mapping of the key concepts underpinning the broader research area (Peters et al., 2015). This scoping review has established clear themes of ‘empowering pedagogical approaches supported by the main sources of evidence collated (Arksey and O’Malley, 2005). In addition, this study has adhered to: the guidance developed by the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) to standardise the conduct and reporting of scoping reviews, and to further enhance the scoping review methodology (Tricco et al., 2016; Pham et al., 2014; Arksey and O’Malley, 2005).

The purpose of the scoping review conducted was centred on a key question, and four sub-questions. This scoping review aims to serve as a useful mapping device for knowledge to further explore wellbeing and empowerment through education. In addition, the scoping review clarifies key concepts, characteristics, factors related to concepts, and identifies knowledge gaps (Munn et al., 2018). The empirical evidence on education and empowerment sits with a robust and small number of studies addressing the specific questions (Peters et al., 2015; Pham et al., 2014). The exploration of literature examines what makes education empowering or disempowering, the ontological understanding of empowerment from girls and women, the connection to health and wellbeing, and concepts such as lifelong and life wide learning are central to this scoping review (Jarvis, 2011). However, a limitation to the scoping review was the scant literature on indigenous knowledge and its contribution to empowerment and wellbeing. This limitation is reflected on a larger issue regarding the marginalisation of traditional knowledge systems by the colonial projects (Rodney, 1972).

4.2 Background

The growing dissent with inequality, marginalisation, and abuse of human rights, particularly poignant in the case of girls and women, has placed a level of scrutiny and political pressure on the international community and governments to

address the issues. The UN sustainability agenda for 2030, has highlighted the relevance of women and girls in our modern society (UN, 2019b). The representation of women are mostly quantitative (WEF, 2019). Sen (1999, p.11) argues:

These empirical connections reinforce the valuation priorities. In terms of the medieval distinction between “the patient” and “the agent”, this freedom-centred understanding of economics and of the process of development is very much an agent-oriented view. With adequate social opportunities, individuals can effectively shape their own destiny and help each other. They need not be seen primarily as passive recipients of the benefits of cunning development programmes. There is indeed a strong rationale for recognising the positive role of free and sustainable agency – and even of constructive impatience.

One of the crippling aspects to the current mainstream education system is that it is institutionalised. The formalisation of mainstream education has altered the purpose of education. The exercise of health and meaningful social participation has been replaced by the certified, not the skill holder (Illich, 1970). There is a global learning crisis, which has adversely affected the health and wellbeing of those most deprived of ‘education,’ disabling their ability to make meaningful choices to alter their life circumstances and that of their environment (Page and Czuba, 1999). Irrespective of the increase in educational enrolment at primary school age (UNESCO, 2020), the global estimate is 617 million children and adolescents lack a minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics (United Nations, 2019b, p.30). These statistics are reflective of a deeper systematic issue in our mainstream education, signalling a chronic incompetence.

The effects of Covid-19 on our global education system provide a relevant case study. The disconnection between education and its role in building happy and healthy people have ricocheted on a global scale. The United Kingdom has experienced a rise in parents, who now wish to ‘unschool’ their children. The rigidity of the modern curriculum has severed links to education, wellbeing and social development (Lightfoot, 2020). The pandemic has opened up a conversation to examine education and health due to the surge in mental health issues and

increase in suicide rates (Pandya, 2020). The question which emerges is whether education is beneficial as it stands? Are students learning about coping with uncertainty? There is an awakening after the Covid-19 pandemic that has provided a space to legitimately question our current institutions and the link to wellbeing. Illich's (1978) exposes the negative side to modernity as: "such a time-consuming acceleration, sick-making health care, stupefying education (Illich, 1978, p. 14).

As argued by Illich, (1970, p.5), "educational disadvantage cannot be cured by relying on education within the school." Education from a global perspective is an essential institution for the preservation of its members and the sustainability of social structures (Rodney, 1972, p.239). Are the benefits to education been felt across the different socio-economic and geographical contexts? Or, are our institutions largely advancing an elite? The background chapter of this thesis (page 41) discusses some of these inequalities despite a countries natural resources. One of the critiques on education is that it is positioned as stabilising and inherently good for society. In much of the literature education is argued to have a 'catalytic' effect on productivity and economic development (Knowles, Lorgelly, and Owen, 2002). Such portrayals obscure the duality and potentially dangerous and divisive aspects to education (Bush, 2000). By applying these broad brushstrokes and imparting a euro-American notion to education, its colonial history is largely overlooked. Rodney (1972) discusses the education system of pre-colonial Africa that interwove informal and formal learning with a purpose to cultivate healthy and apt personalities. The universities which were thriving in this era such as in Egypt, the Al-Azhar University, in Morocco, the University of Fez, and in Mali, the University of Timbuktu, give testimony to the high standards and successful mix between formal, informal and non-formal education in pre-colonial Africa (Rodney, 1972, p.240). The colonial and capitalist legacy eroded the status of women and girls, in regions such as Africa Central and Southern Asia, South America and the Middle East. The harsh division of labour is still present in policy (UN WOMEN, 2019). The current state of women and girls means they operate in an uneven developmental landscape creating a paradoxical tension between development and equality (Smith, 1990). The shortcomings of governments, development agencies,

harmful cultural and religious practices, disproportionately burden women and girls (UN WOMEN, 2019). Sen (1999) argues that any practical attempt to better women's wellbeing should draw on the agency of women themselves to bring about change. From a development lens, some of the main challenges faced by women are a fairer distribution of unpaid care work duties, unequal reproductive rights, and discriminative inheritance law (UN WOMEN, 2019). From a development lens, empowerment is largely externalised by international agencies and local government. Therefore, it is from a much-erred standpoint we look to Western developed countries to dictate and lead the fight for women's equality. In independent pre-colonial Africa, women held power, the 'mother-right,' which bestowed women with the keys to inheritance, a prevalent feature to a greater or lesser degree throughout African societies. Women occupying positions as heads of state was not uncommon, as for example among the Lovedu of Transvaal peoples of South Africa, the Rain-Queen, which held both political, and religious functions. Furthermore, the roles of 'Queen Mother' or 'Queen Sister' were among some of the most powerful positions within African societies. The destruction of the African indigenous culture by colonial and capitalist rule eroded a political and cultural norm of women's empowerment. The colonialist rollout of the money sector drew lines in the sand and divided forms of employment as 'modern' and 'traditional' leaving behind African women (Rodney, 1972). Traditional and authentic African culture did not set out to oppress women. In South Africa, the Zulu royal women demonstrated leadership in economic, religious, and sometimes military matters, before, during and after King Shaka's reign (Mikell, 1997). Such insights into history allows us to question our own ideals about gender equality and female empowerment. The dominant image of Western societies as pinnacles of women's empowerment has a sinister relationship to freedom and liberation. The dark history of colonial powers is more reflective of a history that implemented female oppression (Rodney, 1972).

In this context, the objective of this scoping review is to identify and map literature on pedagogical approaches that empower girls and women from a global perspective. This study will inform and point towards future research and raise

awareness of the need for an inclusive education policy, that promotes the health, and wellbeing of its participants in the context of uneven development.

4.3 Scoping Review Aim and Objectives

The aim of this review was to examine the evidence relating to current educational approaches that facilitate empowerment – with a focus on girls and women from an uneven development context. Through this scoping review, the researcher identified gaps in current research and made recommendations regarding the need to increase future empirical evidence on indigenous practices that facilitate empowerment, health, and wellbeing to girls and women and communities. The title for this scoping review is: *Educational Approaches that Facilitate Empowerment*. The scoping review question is: Do the contemporary educational approaches facilitate empowerment? The full search has returned peer review journal articles as well as policy and practice papers from the field. The following objectives support the aim of the review:

1. To analyse the educational approaches that promote health and wellbeing of girls and women as key. This analysis will give insight into women's social positioning within marginalised communities. Furthermore, it will allow for a deeper understanding of how health and wellbeing is applied to girls and women from an uneven development context. It may also establish whether its application encompasses empowerment or is narrowly interpreted to mean absence of disease and infirmity and address reproductive and contraceptive issues.
2. To understand empowerment from an ontological perspective for women and girls from marginalised communities. This type of knowledge gives authenticity to policy makers and direction to what constitutes real empowerment, shifting policy initiatives from their current paternalistic application of empowerment.
3. To examine the restructuring of global and national educational policies, and whether the introduction of technology is aiding the empowerment of its learners.

The objectives of the review are based on the pedagogical approaches which facilitate the empowerment of women and girls and wellbeing. To meet the objectives for this scoping review, it is essential to broaden the scope and search for the answers which may fall beyond mainstream educational practices. The search was conducted with this purpose to capture the pedagogical approaches which are being missed by the more dominant discourse on education, health, and empowerment. Leading to the inclusion of current indigenous practices from a global perspective. The justification to this is that gender discrimination is a world issue and any insight into empowering pedagogical approaches needs to be considered.

To conclude, the objective of the scoping review is to summarise the body of literature relating to empowerment through education, whilst looking at understanding the purpose of education and any empowering pedagogical approaches. The purpose of this study is to use this collated evidence to establish a methodological framework that promotes empowerment, health, and wellbeing for girls and women through education. The objectives were further guided by the following research questions:

- What are the existing indigenous practices that promote the health and wellbeing of its community, especially with a focus on women and girls?
- What is the ontological understanding of empowerment from women and girls from the local perspective, within the context of uneven global development, with a focus on Sub-Saharan Africa?
- What are the global and national policies on reforming/restructuring education as a method to facilitate empowerment with a focus on technological development?
- What is the purpose of education as a method to facilitate empowerment?

4.4 Scoping Review Method

4.4.1 Protocol

A study protocol for the scoping review was developed and peer reviewed. The methodological framework for this scoping review was informed primarily by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), while also considering clarifications extended by Levac, Colquhoun and O'Brien (2010) to the original framework. The recommended five stages for a scoping review produced by the JBI (Tricco et al., 2016) are:

1. Protocol, title, background, identifying review questions, and objectives.
2. Eligibility criteria and comprehensive searching for the identification of relevant sources of evidence.
3. Source evidence selection screening.
4. Extraction and charting of the results/data.
5. Conclusion and recommendations.

The Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, Research type (SPIDER) approach was adopted as the strategy search tool to support the exploratory nature of this scoping review (Cooke, Smith and Booth, 2012). As synthesis of qualitative research provides more support for researchers, the descriptive and interpretive nature of this review needed a search tool that would allow for a robust refinement of relevant articles. In particular, the phenomena studied being topical saved valuable time; irrelevant articles could be eliminated without compromising the quality of the retrieval (Booth, 2011). Table 4 shows the process by which the relevant questions and lines of inquiry emerged. The exploratory nature of this scoping review centres around whether education can empower women and girls and addresses the meaning of empowerment. The scoping review allows for an ample assessment of education in the broad sense of the word, fulfilling the exploratory nature to this study by allowing exploration of the characteristics and concepts, which facilitate empowerment (Peters et al., 2015).

Table 4 The search terms used for the SPIDER search.

S	PI	D	E	R
Sample	Phenomenon of interest	Design	Evaluation	Research type
Who are the people you are interested in studying?	What do you hope to understand? Is it behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, or individual experience?	What research methods or theoretical frameworks are appropriate?	What outcome measures are you interested in?	Three apply here: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods
Women, mothers, Communities, female leaders	How can education empower? Challenges and barriers encountered by virtue of being women and girls, lived experiences of being women and girls, dreams, aspirations, education, views of self-belief in self and fulfilment in life	Interview, focus groups, case studies, observational studies, or lived experiences	Views, experiences, opinions, perceptions, beliefs, feelings, knowledge or understanding	Quantitative and or mixed methods and qualitative
Smaller Groups	How can education empower? Education/Empowerment	Theoretical framework Research method	Outcome measures	Qualitative
Women* mother* girl* Pubescent* daughter* Student* Wife* African Women* Sub-Saharan Africa* Africa* Women in poverty*	Inequality* marginalise *marginalisation* Education* pedagogy* learning* education and empowerment* informal education or formal education or non-formal education* indigenous* Empowerment* health* wellbeing* fulfilment*	Interview* focus group* case study* observational studies* lived experiences*	What is the experience of empowerment? How can education empower? What does empowerment mean? What is the experience of being a girl – woman What does it mean to become?	Qualitative* mixed methods and or* quantitative

4.4.2 Development of Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Due to the large number of related studies regarding education, empowerment of girls and women, as with systematic reviews, inclusion criteria were predetermined to guide decisions on the sources to be included. This helped identify several research ‘gaps’ including the absence of studies discussing indigenous practices and informal education, and their relevance on health and

wellbeing. These findings may encourage the identification of future research initiatives (Munn et al., 2018).

4.4.2.1 Eligibility Criteria

Articles that satisfied the following inclusion criteria were included.

Types of participants: The review included studies focusing on women and girls as participants between the ages of 12 to 45 years. The significance of the age group was to capture the beginning of a girl's pubescent development through to womanhood. The inclusion criteria for the participants' demographics, such as geographical location included all countries, allowing for an international scope with a focus on Sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, class and religious background, and sexual orientation were without restriction. The studies were sought to cover all forms of educational experience including formal, informal, or non-formal. Indigenous knowledge was also included as it is important to dig deeper into other pedagogical approaches, which may fall outside the traditional ambit of education.

Study designs: There were no restrictions on the study design. Other primary studies included opinion pieces, editorials/commentaries, systematic reviews, narrative reviews, reports, grey literature, conference abstracts, journal articles, policy papers, evaluations, discussions, position papers and guidelines.

Study types: although mainly qualitative studies were returned from the search, quantitative and mixed methods studies were not excluded.

Policies of interest: Global, regional, and national policies and policy evaluations addressing educational approaches to equalise marginalised and oppressed groups were included. Policies which facilitated empowerment and advocated for the inclusion of all and the advancement of social justice and also recommendations on policy were included.

4.4.2.2 Measure Outcomes

The key concept being researched centred around educational approaches which facilitate empowerment; studies to be considered were those that evaluated the application of pedagogical approaches for the facilitation of empowerment and wellbeing. The measure outcomes were: improved health and wellbeing, increased

voice and agency, greater social participation, acquisition of new skills, ability to make meaningful choices, increased employment perspectives, recommendations for pedagogical approaches and educational programmes, technological impact on education to empower women and girls, the ontological understanding of empowerment through helping families and community, reform, and recommendations for global and national policies.

4.4.2.3 Exclusion Criteria

Articles published before the year 2000 were excluded, as the global approaches to education changed drastically after 2000, with the rise of technology as well as the rapidly changing social, political, and economic global landscape.

I excluded literature that was not published in the English language. Books, book reviews, letters, notes, poetry, fiction, dissertations and theses, magazines, pamphlets, newspapers, general information, features, and other sources such as encyclopaedias, reference works, audio and video works, and commentaries were excluded. Other excluded document types included: news and general information, conference papers, book and literature reviews, interviews, prose, correspondence and speech/lectures, letters to the editor, memoirs/personal documents, biographies, front page /cover stories, credits/acknowledgements, technical reports, images/photography, market research, recipes, tables of contents, book chapters, directories, industry reports, accounting and tax standards, editorial cartoons/comics, fund/grant fellowships/awards, annual reports, company profiles, reviews, obituaries or peer reviews.

Literature which did not address inequality and marginalisation was excluded due to broader research perspective; the aim and purpose of the research is to formulate a methodological pathway to facilitate the empowerment of women and girls that can be adapted to other marginalised communities from a global perspective. Literature was excluded that failed to address inequality and marginalisation as this would miss the wider pedagogical approaches and indigenous practices, which are outlined in the objectives from this scoping review.

The exclusion criteria also apply to literature with a sole focus on feminism and African feminism as searchable terms. Although they are relevant to the broader discussion of the scoping review and enriching the discussion, they are not the focus of the scoping review and would move the search away from pedagogical and educational approaches that empower.

4.4.3 Search Strategy and Data Sources

For evidence screening, the predetermined eligibility criteria were applied to the following study searches.

4.4.3.1 Information Sources

The following seven electronic databases were searched: Web of Science: (May 7, 2021), Scopus (May 7, 2021), MEDLINE (May 8, 2021), OVID–Social policy and practice (May 8, 2021), Proquest (May 8, 2021), ERIC–EBSCO, (May 11, 2021), British Education Index (EBSCO) (May 13, 2021). Additionally, I conducted a grey literature search on the following databases: ReliefWeb, ALNAP, UN Development Programme, UN Children’s Fund, World Bank (UNICEF), African Development Bank, Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergency (INEE), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), UN Women, African Union, Southern African Development Community. Table 5 shows the selection process regarding both the academic databases and the grey literature. It was essential to follow a rigorous selection process partly due to the numerous identified concepts which emerged as part of the use of SPIDER as a search tool for the retrieval of quantitative research. The databases were arranged in a thematical order to ensure optimisation of all relevant databases.

Table 5 Database table.

Databases	Education	Women studies	Social science	African studies	Health sciences	Political sciences	Indigenous studies	Development studies
Academic Literature								
British Education Index (EBSCO)	x	x				x		
ERIC (EBSCO)	x	x	x	x				x
MEDLINE (Ovid)			x		x			x
ProQuest	x	x	x		x	x		
Social Policy and Practice (Ovid)								
Scopus		x	x		x	x		x
Web of Science		x	x					x
Grey Literature								
ReliefWeb	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
ALNAP	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
UN Development Programme	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
UN Children's Fund	x	x		x	x	x		x
World Bank	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
African Development Bank	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
INEE	x	x	x	x		x		x
OECD	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
UN WOMEN	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
African Union	x	x		x	x	x		x
Southern African Development Community	x	x		x				x

A rigorous advanced search strategy was developed with the assistance of a professional librarian from the Health Sciences Department at the University of York (see acknowledgement). The following combination of search terms and keywords were used with all the databases to ensure accuracy and robustness. The studies were extracted into a Mendeley library, where a folder for each database was systematically created, with one final folder created to filter out duplicates. The language filter used was English Only, and a time filter from 2000 to 2020 was used for the research articles.

The results from the search in the 'Preferred Reporting Items for systematic review and Meta-Analysis Protocols' (PRISMA) flowchart are presented in Figure 7, which details the volume of retrieved material. There is a lot written around the issues of empowerment and education for women and girls. However, the scoping review question discusses an aspect to education which is not as documented, partly due to the absence of women's and girls' input on the matter. The dominating feature of education fell heavily on formal education and its impact on girls and women. A key aspect to the advanced search strategy was the development of main concepts; this was implemented to fine-tune the search retrieval. Four main concepts were developed, which can be best described as operating as filters for rigour and relevance, including:

1. Women + Girls
2. Inequality + Marginalised
3. Education
4. Empowerment + Health

As optional sub-concepts, the search strategy adopted (a) Sub-Saharan Africa + Qualitative, using these additional sub-concepts to sieve through relevant abstracts. The following combination of search terms and keywords were used in the search:

(TI= (Wom?n OR girl*) OR TS= (pubescent* daughter* student*) OR TS= (wi?e) OR TS= (African wom?n OR Sub-Saharan Africa OR Africa*) OR TS= (Wom?n "and " poverty))

(TS= (inequality OR marginalis?))

(TI= (Educat* OR pedagogy* OR pedagogical OR learn*) OR TI= (education
“and “empower*) OR TS= (informal educat* or formal educat* or non-formal
educat* OR indigenous*)) AND LANGUAGE: (English)

(TI= (empower* OR fulfilment) OR TS= (health* OR wellbeing))

(Combination) #4 AND #3

(Combination) #3 AND #1

(Combination) #6 AND #5

(Combination) #2 AND #1

(Combination) #8 AND #7

The search term combination was designed to avoid variations across all relevant databases used. Through using the search words (Wom?n OR girl*) OR TS= (pubescent* daughter* student*), the search retrieval could collect all forms of variations to the word, allowing for a broad and accurate application of the words of interest. Studies were extracted into a Mendeley library, where they were subjected to further screening through separate folder assignments as described in the following section. The language filter was used across all databases, as English only, together with a time filter, for the time between 2000 and 2020 for the research articles.

4.4.3.2 Study Selection

The search strategy encompasses both identifiable published and unpublished literature (grey literature). It was important to consider studies from the grey literature as this allowed for an overview of policies and educational programmes, which were being implemented by the international development community. As shown in Table 5 Database tableTable 5 , all relevant databases with an interest in development issues and women’s equality were used, including the various organisations corresponding to the UN. The initial electronic dataset search conducted using the keywords and their synonyms yielded a search of (n=7,549) documents. I followed the three-method recommended by the standard JBI

systematic review (Peters et al., 2015). I initially conducted a limited search of a selection of relevant databases, which then focused on an analysis of the textual words, which were contained in the title and abstract. This also included the index terms used to describe the article. A second search using all identified keywords and index terms was then performed across all included databases. Independent screening ensued (n=116) through a thorough assessment of the entire articles, whilst referring to the inclusion criteria to filter out any articles that did not meet the criteria. Thirty-two citations were found to be eligible; lastly, the reference list of all identified reports and articles was screened for additional studies. To guarantee comprehensiveness, a manual examination of selected journals for articles and reference lists was conducted to identify additional citations. The eligibility reduced to a small number (n=32), with only one supplementary citation identified (n=1), which made up the narrative synthesis based on the eligibility criteria.

As discussed previously, the specificity of the search allowed for a clear understanding of the justifications of choice and a reviewer was consulted when needed. Figure 7 demonstrates the scarcity of articles that discuss empowerment from the perspective of girls and women who are marginalised. My concept design was imperative to direct the search to an area needing more clarification and highlight 'gaps' in research, which require a deeper understanding of empowerment and education. Figure 7 details the review decision process, including the removal of duplicate citations, and study selection through to the final summary presentation.

In contrast to the studies which remained, there were 6,320 citations that were removed due to ineligibility and duplication. For example, the title and abstract screening presented thousands of citations which referred to education but did not discuss education in relation to girls and women or empowering pedagogical approaches. Three hundred and seventy-eight duplicate citations were excluded; a further 453 citations discussed education in relation to professional education and training practices and or practitioners. This resulted in 528 remaining citations, leading to 116 full retrievable texts. The 84 full text articles that were

excluded with reasons did not discuss pedagogical approaches for the facilitation of empowerment. The discussions centred on inequality, poverty, and references to education, missing the deeper discussion on what constitutes empowering education.

4.4.3.3 Data Abstraction

The abstraction of data for the scoping review used a standardised and pilot-tested data abstraction form developed for the objective of this review. The charting table includes, year of publication, institution affiliation of first author, country of affiliation, last name of corresponding author, country of affiliation of corresponding author, collaborations between academics and non-academics, name of journal, type of publication, the study design, the year the study was conducted, statement on conflict of interest and ethical approval (see Appendix A). In addition to this, the research characteristics found in the articles (Appendix B) were extracted, including the educational benefit, title of the publication, and empowerment quotation, with a particular focus on the ontological understanding of empowerment from girls and women. This included the promotion of health and wellbeing, the ability to make meaningful decisions, the improvement of employment, the increase of voice, and agency.

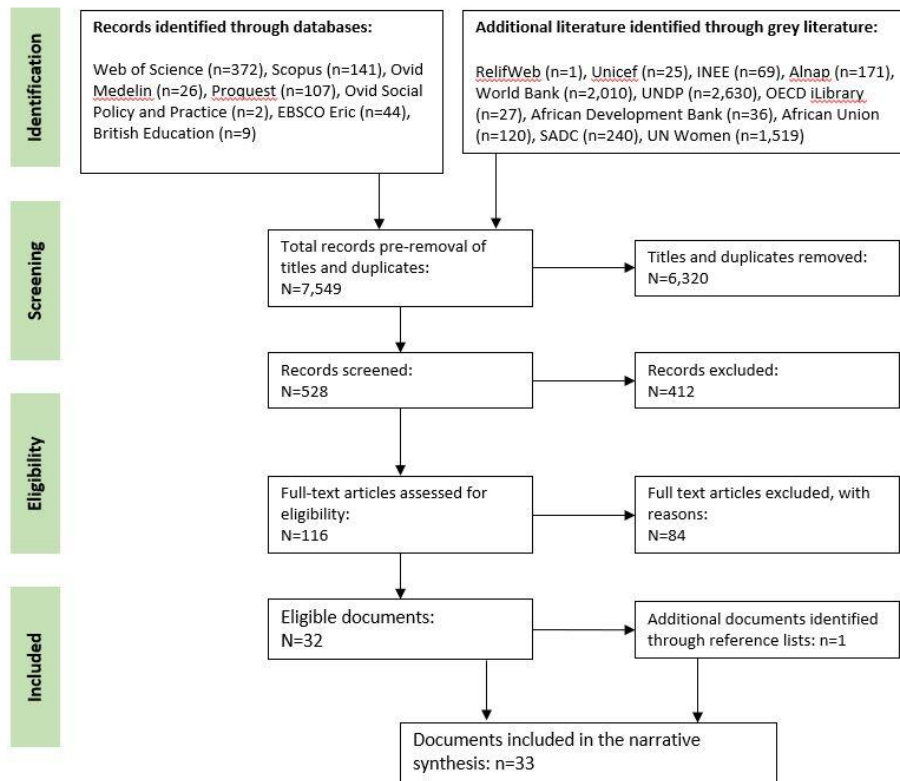


Figure 7 PRISMA diagram (Source: Moher et al., 2009).

4.5 Findings and Discussion

Of the 33 studies that were included in the narrative synthesis, 3 theme classifications emerged. The first theme classification discusses 10 themes relating to empowering pedagogical approaches. The second theme classifications has one theme on disempowering pedagogical approaches with eight sub-themes, and the final classification discusses two emerging themes. In relation to the aim of this study the researcher argues it is equally important to understand the disempowering aspects of education as there is a direct link to its negative effects on the learner's health and wellbeing. As part of the findings, the four guiding research questions developed the coding strategy from which the 14 themes emerged and three theme classifications;

1. Empowering pedagogical approaches.
2. Disempowering pedagogical approaches.

3. Purpose outcome in education.

As outlined in Figure 7, the (N=116) full-text articles assessed for eligibility were read in accordance with the eligibility criteria and colour coded to represent attributed content that related to one of the four emerging research questions: (1) Blue, (2) Yellow, (3) Orange (4) Pink. Using the programme Nvivo 12 Pro, the 'nodes' were developed as detailed concepts guided by the emerging research question. These concepts were further refined by the categorisation of relationships between the 'nodes' that were classified into sets. The final procedure to the coding was the assignment into cases, which were the emerging themes that contributed to the three final theme classifications as set out above. This coding exercise allowed for a clear grasp of cornerstone approaches that empower girls and women from an uneven development context.

The scoping review retrieved a high level of relevant articles. One of the first discussion points to be addressed is this study aimed to view education in its entirety, through its formal, non-formal, and informal attributes – without embarking on a divisive critique and further segregating education into one camp or the other. Contemporary educational approaches that pertain to the aim of this study are dissected and analysed in this thesis. The 13 total emerging themes and sub-themes included:

Case Classification One: Empowering pedagogical approaches

- i. Conscientisation and safe spaces
- ii. Child-centred and innovative teaching methods
- iii. Emotional learning, supportive bonds, and social learning
- iv. Ontological understanding of empowerment from girls and women
- v. Relevant community education
- vi. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) School model in India
- vii. Life skills that promote wellbeing
- viii. Exposing students to new environments
- ix. Mentorship and guidance
- x. Mother tongue inclusion (Bilingual teaching)

Case Classification Two: Disempowering pedagogical approaches

- i. Barriers to education
- ii. Hierarchical structures and rigid formalisation
- iii. Financial access and support
- iv. Narrow application to education
- v. Regressive norms and traditions
- vi. Education is strongest when it embraces the diversity of its students
- vii. Quality of education
- viii. Empowerment is paternalistic
- ix. Education that is disconnected to the learner's community and environment

Case Classification Three: Purpose outcome in education

- i. Digital education
- ii. Cash transfer programmes

4.5.1 Part I: Empowering Pedagogical Approaches

The global scope to this study permitted an overall analysis of the contemporary educational approaches in relation to the empowerment of girls and women from marginalised backgrounds. The multi-level analyses revealed connectedness and commonalities within the complex social contexts that girls and womenfolk from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and South America share (Hankivsky Olena, 2014). The emerging theme of 'conscientization and safe spaces' was found in both the academic literature and grey literature. Figure 8 shows that in the academic literature, this theme was found in 13 separate journals and referenced 78 times. In the grey literature, it appears in one brief, referenced five times. Conscientisation and safe spaces is attributed to the colour code pink, which helps answer research question 4, 'What is the purpose to education as a method to facilitate empowerment.' As shown in Figure 8, the percentage of coverage is significant throughout the majority of articles, pointing to its relevance as an

empowering pedagogical approach. This is the most referenced and cited pedagogical approach throughout all the academic literature retrieved. It can be argued that as a theme, 'safe spaces' facilitate a deeper learning about oneself and is a catalyst for empowerment. This theme is directly in line with the finding of Freire (1972), who argues that the 'pedagogy of the oppressed' is carved with the oppressed, rather than for the oppressed. In this education ought to be a student led pedagogy, Freire (1972, p.30) argues:

The pedagogy of the oppressed, a pedagogy which must be forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade.

From an ancient philosophical lens, the process of reflection can be compared with the fine balance between chaos and order, as captured by the famous yin and yang symbols of the Taoists (Veith, 1949). Finding internal equilibrium requires an understanding of the self. The disadvantage to the current state of formal education is the focus on external knowledge. This provides the grounding to examine further the purpose to education which is addressed in research question 4 of this study. In line with the thesis title, the purpose of empowering pedagogy is to enable a deeper knowledge, which permits the learner to access a true understanding of being – of becoming, through an internal process of transformation (Freire, 1972). In line with empowerment as a personal reflective process, the acquisition of this self-knowledge is fostered between teachers and students. The outcome is the emergence of new realities and identities (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2019; Walker and Loots, 2018; Dejaeghere, Wiger, and

Willemsen, 2016; Shah, 2016; Omwami, 2015; Wilson-Strydom and Walker, 2015; Seeberg, 2014; Wiggins, 2012; Nkechinyere Amadi, 2011; Shah, 2011; Zhao, 2011).

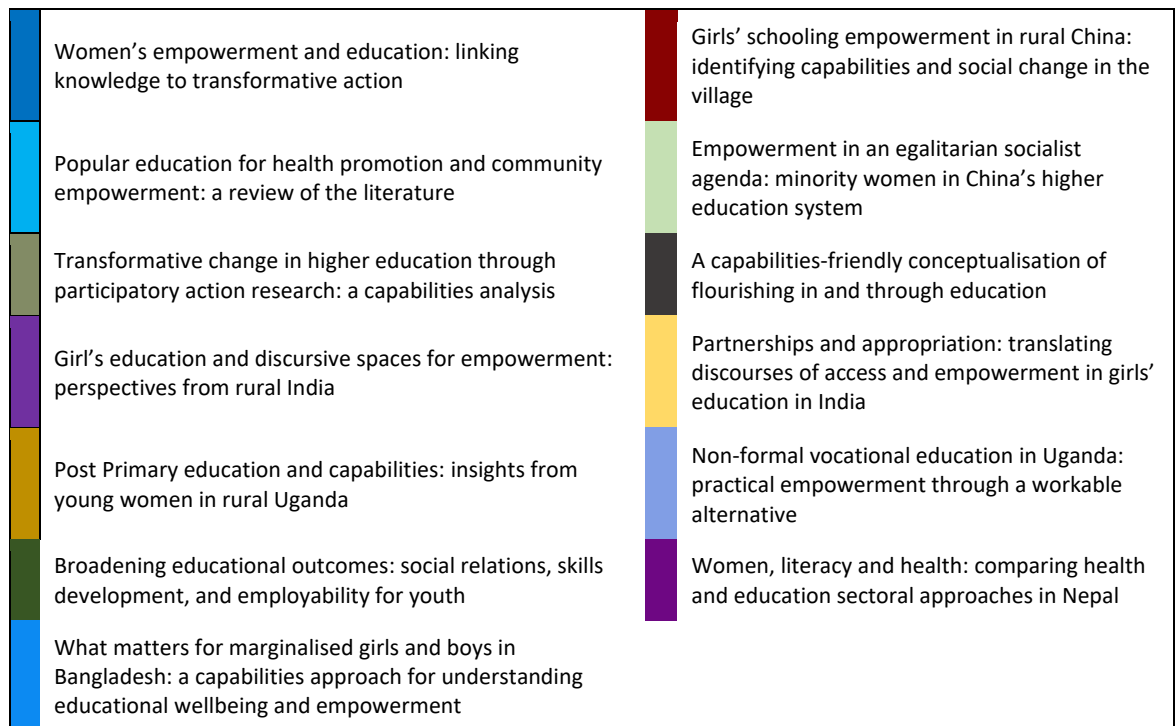
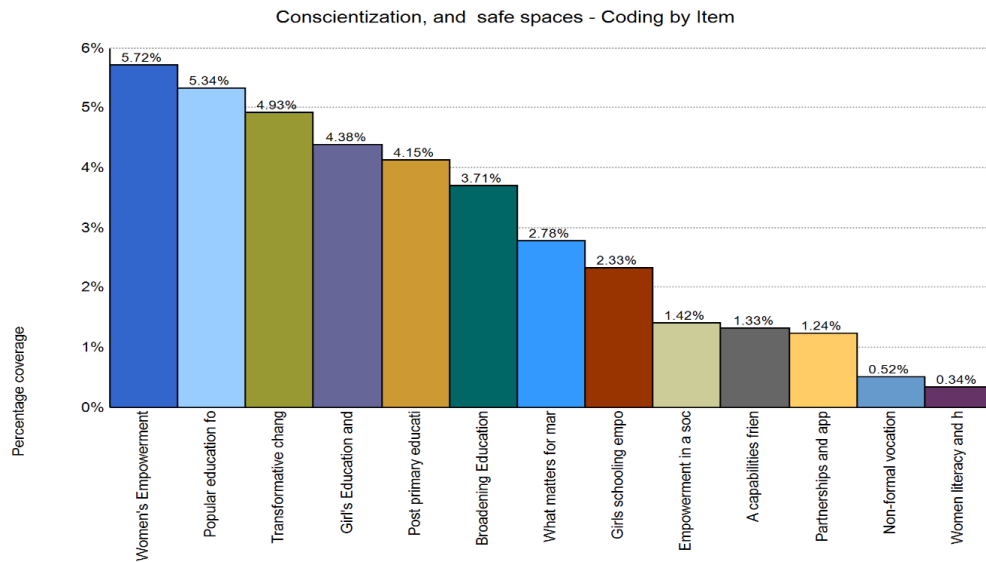


Figure 8 Conscientisation and safe spaces – coding by item chart.

As discussed in the grey literature, the brief raises three important points: the use of girl only safe spaces, the socialisation aspect, and emotional learning and also a programme specific, BRAC, one of the world's largest NGOs that has successfully run safe space clubs to promote health-related education based on life-skills training (World Bank, 2020a). The empirical analysis of the KGBV in Gujarat, which followed an intensive ethnographic inquiry, has shown a successful model of a school for the empowerment of girls. The school targets some of the most marginalised areas in rural India. The school employs several unique factors which have contributed to its success. Firstly, it has government backing, clear support, and motive to ensure its focus is to empower girls. Secondly, there is a healthy partnership with CARE India to support the staff in finding new pedagogical approaches. Thirdly, the whole school structure and curriculum are child centred (Shah, 2016; Baraua and Das, 2011). A defining aspect is the school administrative aspect, as it looks to break away from formal mainstream hierarchal structures. Students and teachers alike experience an ontological understanding of empowerment. This has been by far the most revealing element of the initial findings (Shah, 2011). In line with this very purpose driven mission, the headmaster discusses some of their pedagogical approaches, which serve both the students and the teachers alike. The teachers can access a space, that allows them to develop new teaching methods and connect with the girls in a very personal way, and converse frankly about the social pressures and realities which make a part of their world. Some of the challenges highlighted in the research were the formal aspect to the school. The KGBV school had adopted the national curriculum and within its set-up, there was a blur between the formal and informal elements of teaching. The KGBV school is a central point to the discussion of this study, as it offers the only successful model that incorporates pedagogical approaches to empower girls in an uneven development context.

A deeper critical engagement into the current literature on the development within policy and theory that led to the KGBV school model is necessary. The KGBV school is the result of a prolonged attempt to solve the issue of girl's education since the writing of the Indian Constitution (Rath, 2008). This school model marries

the relational aspects that is amiss in a teacher centered approach. Barua and Das (2011) in their study on KGV found that the teachers showed responsibility and accountability towards their students. The relational aspect to the school has also impacted the girl's wider community. A study by Chaudhary, Amin and Rugi (2012) discuss the change of attitude towards girls' education that falls within the schools' efforts and part of the relationship building. The programme is not free from issues and the economic strains are discussed by a study conducted by Deore, et al. (2012) that found all KGBVs schools are working in the rent building. Despite this, the school model is designed to work with marginalised girls from low socio-economic backgrounds. A study from Das, Salam and Adikari (2013) discusses the pedagogical approaches on empowerment from the KGBV which has managed to effectively rise the students' level of confidence to that of general groups that do not share the same difficulties. An extensive field study by Baruah (2013) supports the scoping review findings in showing that the KGBV model looks beyond school retention and enrolment figures and addresses the divide between education, empowerment and wellbeing. The field study found that KGBVs were successful educational institution in empowerment women from rural and marginalised backgrounds. The current literature on the KGBV model is vast and it provides validation to the scoping review's findings.

The global reach to this study suggests that there are examples of empowering pedagogy beyond Western mainstream education. This is substantiated by 'pedagogies of the heart' by Dalai Lama (2015), education for a wholesome development, seen in the work of Tagore (1929), and the work by Krishnamurti (2000) on the internal flourishing. These are pedagogical philosophies operating in the Global South. The colonial legacy within mainstream education is tattered with strict curriculum and hierarchal structures that limit spaces that support creativity and co-learning (Rodney, 1972). The only empowering model retrieved by the scoping review appears to be in India, Gujarat. The scoping review explicitly shows a gap within the academic and grey literature examining non-Western pedagogical approaches. The dominant discourse on education and wellbeing tends to be missing educational examples that fall outside the Western

domain. The findings explained in Figure 10 and Figure 10 reveal the delicately woven pedagogical approaches which stem from conscientization (self-reflection) and safe spaces. The code relationships argue for a social and emotional aspect to empowering education as illustrated in the first four columns in Figure 8. In addition, to imagine alternative futures was strongly embedded in the formed relationships with peers and teachers. Dejaeghere, Wiger, and Willemsen, (2016, p.469) argue:

Over the three years of interviews, youth talked about how they imagined their futures in new ways. In one example of how a youth now views herself more agentically, a female youth who is a daughter of a single mother, the oldest in a family of girls and a mother herself, described how she has begun to imagine her future abilities and role in her family differently. She spoke with pride and in detail about how she and another cousin attending school now shared responsibility for their families' well-being. "The two of us are the only people who are there for the family liberation, not like in the past when they used to think that we couldn't do it, but we now know we are the people who can do it.

The longitudinal study by Dejaeghere, Wiger, and Willemsen, (2016) examined data from youth aged 14 to 20 years old. The study was based on two schools in Tanzania that implemented a skills development and entrepreneurship education programme that resulted in social capital gains. This vocational/non-formal educational setting provided the space for a conscientization that propelled the students to imagine an alternative future. Aspirations are born within and can take the learner from a state of inaction to action through empowerment (Wilson-Strydom and Walker, 2015; Seeberg, 2014; Shah, 2011). Nussbaum (2000), as part of her ethics of human development, identifies 10 human capabilities and opportunities that form the base for meaningful human development. Affiliation is discussed as the reciprocal bond connecting people and that facilitates the expression of concern for other human beings. The concept of affiliation can be seen in Figure 8, and is attributed to empowerment. Affiliation can be better see as a form of 'social capital, social interaction, mentoring guidance and counselling, and social learning,' it can be grouped under a wider umbrella term as emotional

learning (Wilson-Strydom and Walker, 2015). Bi-directional activities as discussed in the academic retrieval reaffirm the importance of restoring the human interaction in education (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2019; Shah, 2016; Jones, 2015; Stromquist, 2015; Seeberg, 2014; Blaak, Openjuru and Zeelen, 2013; Wiggins, 2012; Nkechinyere Amadi, 2011; Dejaeghere and Lee, 2011; Shah, 2011). In building on from Vygotsky's idea of social interactions, one can examine the link between relationship building and a continuous process of learning (LeBlanc and Bearison, 2004).

The role of teachers is central to the development of confidence in pupils as well as peer support. The ability to imagine new future pathways is cultivated by caring teachers (Dejaeghere, Wiger, and Willemsen, 2016). The KGBV educational model evidenced the connection between the formation of deep relationships formed by initiatives like, working in committees; irrespective of caste, the girls learn to work as a team and a higher self-esteem (Shah, 2011). This lies in contrast to the limited space in formal mainstream education for engagement and presence because of its teacher centred, individualistic and curriculum narrow education system (Illich, 1970). The current global mainstream exam-based education system filters out the useful from the useless; this chronic competitiveness excludes the human and emotional aspect from learning, adversely affecting the health, and wellbeing of students.

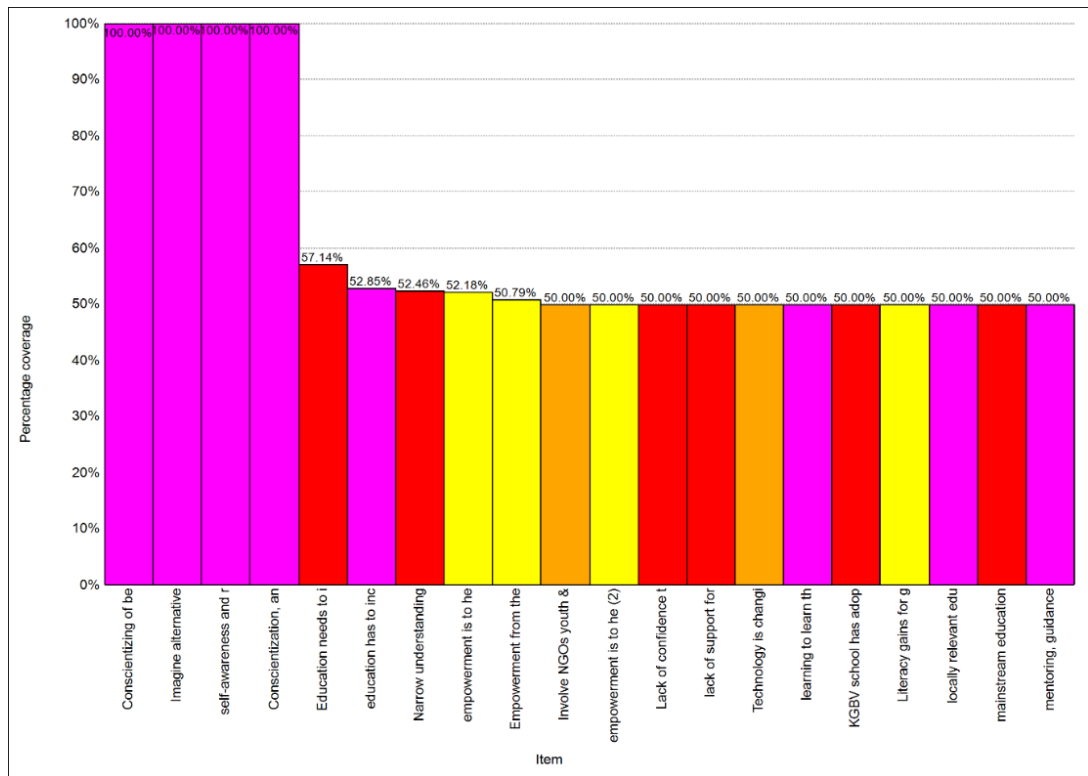


Figure 9 Prominent codes within academic literature retrieval chart.

	Relationship Code: conscientisation of being oppressed (safe space). Informal education allows for unintentional learning		Nodes Code: empowerment is to help family and community
	Relationship Code: imagine alternative futures – formed through relationships with others (social capital that enhances wellbeing) social bonds and support are empowering		Relationship Code: lack of confidence to participate reduces confidence (happiness and emotional aspect to learning and wellbeing). Quality education is being compromised in formal mainstream education
	Relationship Code: self-awareness and reflection as a pedagogy that empowers (safe space). Social interaction as learning		Relationship Code: lack of support for less academically inclined girls (restricting the freedoms of girls). Restricting girls' education
	Case Code: centred flexible and adaptive learning that is relevant (conscientisation <i>and</i> safe spaces)		Case Code: the purpose of education/technology is changing the way we learn
	Relationship Code: education needs to incorporate the full spectrum of education (formal school system). Structural hierarchy is oppressive		Relationship Code: Learning to learn through social learning (life skills). KGBV school adopted a different framework to empower marginalised girls from rural India
	Nodes Code: education has to increase freedoms		Relationship Code: KGBV school has adopted national curriculum in its partnership with the government (government support and policies). Structural hierarchy is oppressive
	Case Code: barriers to education/narrow understanding to education		Relationship Code: literacy gains for girls builds resilience (life skills). Education has to increase freedoms
	Relationship Code: empowerment is to help family and community (non-formal education). Non-formal education gives confidence and independence		Relationship Code: locally relevant education (community teachers and facilities). Non-formal education can create social change
	Case Code: student-centred, flexible, and adaptive learning that is relevant/empowerment from the girls and women is to help the family and community		Relationship Code: mainstream education reaffirms a person's value as a commodity for exchange in the mainstream market (disempowerment). Education has to increase freedoms
	Nodes Code: involve NGOs, youth, and adult groups in the planning		Relationship Code: mentoring guidance and counselling (empowering education). Achieving quality of life

Figure 10 Key prominent codes within the academic literature retrieval chart.

The findings in the grey literature on empowering pedagogical approaches discusses ‘mentoring guidance and peer to peer learning,’ as an extension to the social and emotional learning theme discussed in the academic literature. This is intertwined with a community approach to education such as Save the Children’s Literacy Boost programme work to improve early grade reading skills by monitoring pupils and training teachers to teach core reading skills. Evaluations in Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, and Pakistan showed learning gains, as communities were encouraged to support children’s reading (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2014). The findings discuss the benefits of a community approach to learning that supports the inclusion of mother tongue and bilingual learning. This is an important finding in both the academic and grey literature. Mother tongue inclusion increases learning gains in children, which also supports literacy and health education. Mother tongue inclusion is depicted as bridging learning from school to home and is a foundation for children to acquire another language (Stromquist, 2015; Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013; Nkechinyere Amadi, 2011). Figure 9 presents the codes which are attributed to the case classification of empowering pedagogical approaches. Its ninth code associated girl-child only spaces, (reflection and conscientisation) with increasing health and wellbeing of girls. This is grounded in the life-skills training and relevance of the education that these safe spaces provide (World Bank, 2020a). The findings from the grey literature supports the findings from the academic literature regarding safe spaces that are exclusive to girls’ learning and empowerment. The monitoring and supportive aspect of education is reflective of a child-centred pedagogy, that involves active teaching and learning methods. Engagement as a concept has been vital to The Healthy Learning Programme in Kenya, which has improved health and nutrition knowledge (World Bank, 2020; Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2014). Figure 9 shows an overriding theme throughout the coding and it is the importance of *relevant education* – relevant with regards to context of the learner. This grounds the findings within the impact of inclusivity within our education system. Empowering education needs to be relevant, born from the environment of the learner. This is argued by the Global Education Monitoring Report Team (2014), which recommends an interdisciplinary approach locally relevant to skills building

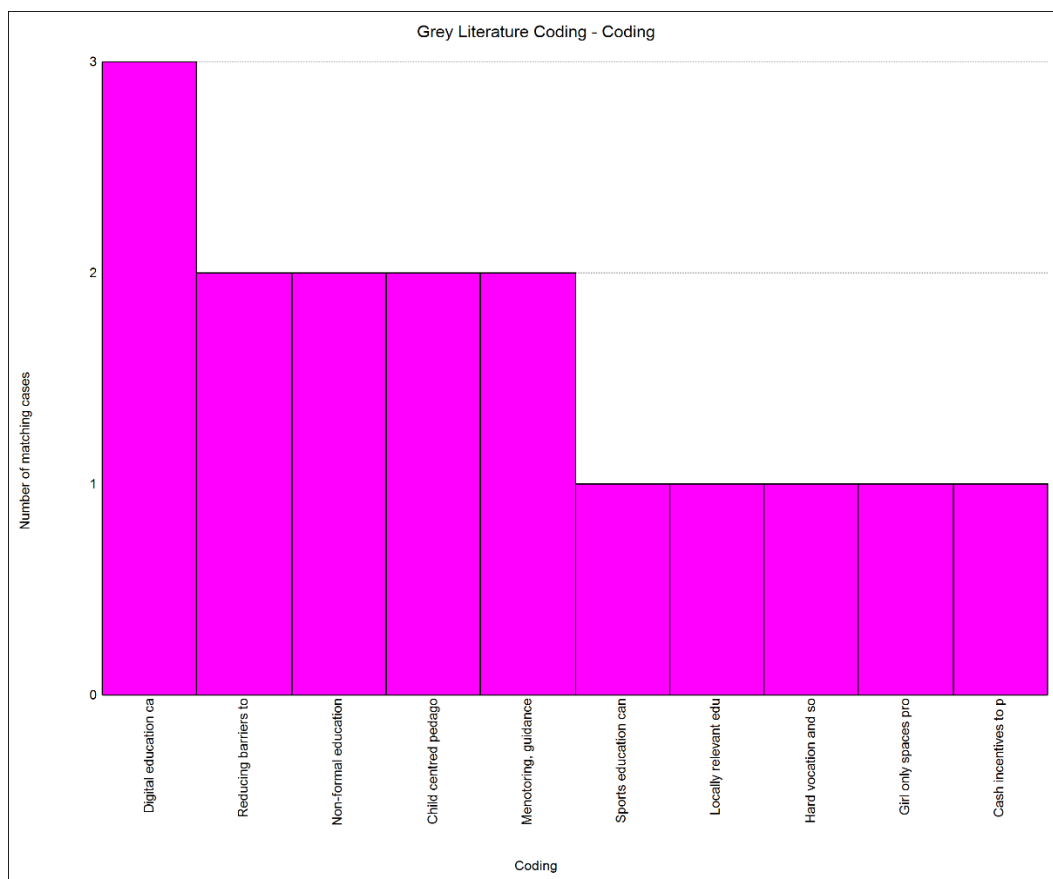
supporting sustainable development. This approach was implemented in South Africa, linking the curriculum to practical learning, where recycling and water harvesting in schools, using alternative energy sources for cooking, creating indigenous gardens, and planting trees was taught. In many ways, this can be inferred as 'useful' learning, whereas our mainstream education system could be termed as useless or stupefying education when seen through the lens of relevance (Illich, 1978).

The malleability to education is a characteristic more present in non-formal and informal learning (Bandiera et al., 2018). Figure 9, case code three, directly discusses non-formal education and its potential to alter attitudes on gender and violence against women, and increase resilience and peacebuilding. (World Bank, 2020b; UN WOMEN, 2013). Hard vocational and soft life skills have contributed to adolescent girls reclaiming back economic empowerment, which inadvertently allows girls to have a greater control over their bodies. Thus, the link between education and health is palpable in its most practical sense (World Bank, 2020b). The findings to this scope review involve a child-centred pedagogy as illustrated in Figure 8 and Figure 9. However, in the case where it is not explicitly mentioned, child-centredness and relevance, which encompasses emotion and social learning, are inferred as per the codes. This depicts the battle ground between what constitutes empowerment through education and disempowerment through education. The findings show that it is the exclusion of the learner in their learning journey. The HEAL programme, which is discussed in the academic literature, addresses key issues to health education and non-formal education. Regardless of the form of education, where rigid instruction is applied, as in the above programme, literacy instruction becomes the educational focus as opposed to using literacy to discuss health issues. The outcome of such pedagogical approaches is the chanting and decoding of words. Once again the findings show a missed opportunity to promote health and wellbeing, an outcome also intensified by the exclusion of the participants' mother tongue (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2019). Within empowering education, 'entrepreneurial skills,' as discussed in the grey literature, include hard vocational and soft life skills, that can garner opportunities

for marginalised girls and boys (Dejaeghere, Wiger, and Willemsen, 2016). Scholars drain on a capability approach, widening the scope of outcomes of education by incorporating quality of life and the promotion of health and wellbeing (Dejaeghere, Wiger, and Willemsen, 2016). The implementation of life skills harnesses confidence and self-reliance, like *ujamaa*, the Swahili word for extended family. This was implemented in Tanzania by president Julius Kambarage Nyerere as the bases for a social and economic policy promoting increased level of self-reliance at a micro and macro level (Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013).

In the longitudinal study by Shah (2011) on the KGBV school. The headmaster (Sheth, personal interview, 2008) discusses the girls returning to their villages and the importance to adapt to their environment. Their empowerment was evidenced in the increase of agency and voice. In this, education was a tool to function in rural Gujarat. The headmaster discusses the importance of adjusting back to society, always remaining true to their living environment – encompasses a child-centred pedagogy (Shah, 2011).

A study focused on the human development capabilities approach, theorising empowerment capabilities, embarked on a series of observational studies following the progress of over 50 village girls in Western China. The lived experience of empowerment showed a stark resemblance to other studies in other countries (Shah, 2016a). Some of the common threads were the expansion of their voice and agency, the ability to put across their wishes, to disagree with family on certain issues, to visualise a future, to acquire a sense of awareness, to help their families and more (Dejaeghere, Wiger, and Willemsen, 2016; Jones, 2015). Figure 9 depicts empowerment as the ability to help family and community. This finding is apparent throughout the academic literature retrieved, where money is discussed as a means to help their loved one's and that of community members. Thus economic empowerment becomes fulfilling when it is attached to a greater purpose, and mostly within the concepts of care (Wilson-Strydom and Walker, 2015). Sen (1999, p.19) discusses the exercise of agency by the "individual as a member of the public and as a participant in economic, social, and political actions."



Cases Code: relevant education/digital education can reduce barriers to education, by increasing access to material and learning opportunities without compromising the quality of education	Cases Code: relevant education/sports education can promote self-confidence and wellbeing
Cases Code: relevant education/reducing barriers to women's education by facilitating childcare or transport	Cases Code: relevant education/locally relevant education develops a greater understanding for life skills and the environment. Non-formal education
Case Code: relevant education/non-formal education can help end violence against women. Facilitates peacebuilding and reaches marginalised communities but needs more support with the government	Cases Code: relevant education/hard vocational and soft skills increase self-confidence, wellbeing, and economic empowerment
Case Code: relevant education/ child-centred pedagogy promotes health and wellbeing, reduces barriers to education and increases learning	Cases Code: relevant education/girl only spaces promote health and wellbeing. Realisation and conscientisation
Cases Code: mentoring, support, and peer to peer learning. Guidance promotes confidence	Cases Code: relevant education/cast incentives need to be linked with conditional outcomes

Figure 11 Grey literature coding.

When we analyse the emergent themes from both the grey literature (Figure 11) and academic literature, the educational landscape that surrounds us is a vibrant learning environment that shapes us continuously. School has become a specialised institution that in most cases bears little resemblance to our everyday world. The literature captures those contemporary educational approaches that bridge learning with our realities. The students experiencing learning with a set of relevant experiences and are exposed to different environments are able to materialise their education into business opportunities (Walker and Loots, 2018; Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013).

4.5.2 Part 2: Disempowering Pedagogical Approaches

Under the grey literature the most prominent theme under disempowering pedagogical approaches pertain to rigid curriculum and unrealistic expectations to match learners' abilities (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2014). Thus supporting the academic findings examining hierarchy and structure as stagnating empowerment. This theme was present in 13 files and referenced 68 times. An important observation in curriculum, is the deep structural divide that penetrates mainstream education. Hierarchical structures embody power imbalances that deepen inequality. The remnants of coloniality with mainstream education persist in its division between race, class and the stereotypical feminine representation (Wilson-Strydom and Walker, 2015; Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013; Shah, 2011; Lloyd and Hewett, 2009). Structured education can be easily manoeuvred to exclude the diverse background of the learner and narrate only one side of history, causing division and potential conflict (Bush, 2000). Freire (1972) criticises the traditional education system that teaches its students by passing on information from one oppressive structure to the next, a criticism similarly endorsed by philosopher Ivan Illich (1926–2002).

What needs to be clear from the onset of the findings, is that education, and in particular formal education due to its structure, constricts empowerment. That should not be misunderstood as not having a positive impact on students. For the purposes of this study, empowerment and wellbeing is at the heart of the investigation. This is a two folded argument – its positive aspects, like,

accreditation, which is so closely associated with the market place, enhances a person's economic capabilities (Sen, 1999). An aspect to education strongly critiqued by Illich (1978), who argues that it is but a façade, that feeds a new modernised poverty intensely dependent on the marketplace. His argument depicts society as dependent on industrial productivity, whilst simultaneously losing our freedom and autonomy to create what we need.

The academic literature retrieved depicts this complex argument through the experience of girls and women in education. Formal education provides a protection against child marriage by delaying it. In the context of uneven development, there are pervasive norms and practices, education is a deterrent, and is mostly seen as positive, but it is strongly associated with traditional gender norms (Raj et al., 2019; Dejaeghere, and Lee, 2011). In this study, qualitative interviews with girls, teachers, and decision makers explore whether the girls were able to postpone or cancel their child marriages. The participants of the study saw education as intrinsically connected to the enhancement of girls' domestic abilities; financial literacy was directed in relation to the upkeep of the household, and health education was for the benefit of the family and future offspring. This supports the findings of relevant education as a contemporary pedagogical approach. In the context of rural or marginalised girls, education like in the KGBV school model, did not elevate the girls to an unrealistic reality. Its purpose was to ensure that the girls could manage their village life and voice their opinions more confidently (Shah, 2016a).

Despite the introduction to free education, formal education is not pro-poor as show in the scoping review findings. Families incur high costs regarding school fees, school materials and transport. In most instances, school does not provide food for children (Seeberg, 2014; Nkechinyere Amadi, 2011). In adhering to the study's research question, our mainstream education system seems more aligned with surviving, and scrounging any formal accreditation to avoid being left destitute. Some of the key findings in this scoping review lie with the qualitative interviews, as they allow for a lived understanding of the experience with formal education. The village girls in rural China discuss some of the aspects of their

education as alienated from village life (Seeberg, 2014). Access and safety were concerns faced by children, and although education is associated with protection, there are two sides to the argument where safe access to schools particularly within a conflict and disaster setting is not the case (Dejaeghere and Lee, 2011).

The findings between health and wellbeing and education emerge as meaningful choice making. Health education directly impacts on the health of girls and women and can facilitate an enhance control over one's body, and self-confidence. The issue of quality education can be seen as stifling the self-confidence and participation of students. The literature further discusses the inequality within mainstream education. Students from marginalised townships felt a lack of preparedness and although they had made it to university, they did not feel equal to their peers that came from privileged backgrounds. Students felt excluded in their ability to participate as equals (Wilson-Strydom and Walker, 2015; Lloyd and Hewett, 2009). To conclude, the findings discuss the barriers to education as structural disempowerment.

4.5.3 Part 3: Purpose Outcome in Education

Digital education is a predominant theme in the grey literature; as shown in Figure 9, it is also assigned to relevant education under its relationship code. This final classification, linked to the purpose outcome in education, discusses the duality to education which emerged in the findings. Competence and confidence were at the heart of purposely empowering education (Wilson-Strydom and Walker, 2015). From a systematic output-input dissemination of knowledge, this classification confronts us with a deeper meaning to empowering education centered on ultimate happiness. The process of 'becoming' is through engaging with skills and knowledge that equip us with the ability to make meaningful choices (Dejaeghere, Wiger, and Willemsen, 2016). The programmes depicting digital education in the grey literature involved digital camps designed for marginalised women that allowed the women to feel confident with their newfound skills. Digital education gave them a greater sense of independence and opened up opportunities for them to pass on those skills to other women in their communities (UN WOMEN, 2018; UN WOMEN, 2012). What digital education is bringing back is

an elevated sense of freedom (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2019). Another important issue is that digital education can provide an ample selection of education topics through webinars, pre-recorded lectures, and videos, which can stimulate the curiosity otherwise stifled by a rigid curriculum, without compromising on the quality of education (Nkechinyere Amadi, 2011); giving more power to the learner.

These common themes continue through to incentives like cash transfer programmes to keep girls in school and increase enrolment in secondary school. As discussed in the grey literature, conditional cash transfers have a much higher success rate than normal cash transfers. For example, the Bangladesh Female Stipend Programme (FSP), where fees are contingent on attendance and exam scores with bi-annual deposits into girls' savings accounts, reaches 2 million girls annually, increasing girls' enrolment by up to 1.2 years (Jones, Presler-Marshall and Kahane, 2019). The 'cash-plus' approach that delivers complementary life skill lessons may have an even greater impact as discussed in the findings (Jones, Presler-Marshall and Kahane, 2019). This is again in line with the overall findings related to attaching useful value to education; suggesting an emerging concept of a methodological pathway that can facilitate empowerment.

The findings from this study have shed considerable insight into the research questions. The minimal evidence on indigenous practices promoting the health and wellbeing of women, girls, and community forms a partial answer to the sub-question. Thus, reinforcing the argument of the institutionalisation, which dominates the current mainstream education system. The untapped potential and presumption of deficit of knowledge (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2019) is hindering the facilitation of empowerment through the current education system. Its absence in the literature is representative of a systematic exclusion: there is a gap in the literature, and a need for further research and insight into the potential of indigenous practices to promote wellbeing and the impact on existing educational programmes, both formal, and non-formal. A key finding in this study was the ontological understanding of empowerment of women and girls from their own local perspective. One of the strongest expressions of empowerment was

women and girls' desire to contribute, to help, and to support family and community. This is in stark contrast with the view from international development agencies and governments, that regard female empowerment as an individualistic economic overcoming, more reflective of a by-product of female empowerment. Overcoming (an economic subsistence) can be easily canvassed as empowerment: for example, formal schooling provides a degree of protection to girls at risk of early child marriage. Its shortcoming lies in a lack of educational opportunities for girls who are married or who become mothers (Raj et al., 2019). The transformative characteristics to empowerment transcend an improved circumstance. It can be better understood as a deeply emotive experience stemming from being able to cultivate attachments and expressions of love and care to others (Nussbaum, 2000). The answer to the sub-questions emerge from finding the true meaning of 'becoming;' it is not a simplistic conclusion of attributing love and care as intrinsic feminine traits. But rather, it is an indication that there lies a disconnect between the rhetoric of empowerment and wellbeing from a Western institutional perspective. This prompts us to question the lens which we have adopted to determine health and wellbeing, and our own understanding and application of health from both an ontological and epistemological position.

Regarding the sub-question on policy reform, the findings suggest that the protective element of school can be met by greater inclusivity. The non-formal educational programmes that incorporate the inclusion of a student's mother tongue is representative of a wider inclusion of their background and community, increasing learning gains (Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013). The implementation of this teaching characteristic is closely aligned to a child-centred approach to learning and is not exclusive to one form of educational programme, rather, the findings indicate that a lack of a student inclusive approach contributes to student drop out figures (Zhao, 2011).

The presence of technology within our education system, as per the findings, suggest that digital literacy is linked with facilitating the empowerment of women and girls. Taking on a deeper analysis of the findings, the educational programmes with ICT training were also designed in a way that promoted

empowerment. For example, women and girls were able to form networks, they received support from one another, the camps provided safe spaces, which led to self-reflection (UN WOMEN, 2012). I would argue it is not the mere acquisition of a new skill, but it is the relevance and useability of this skill within the wider educational landscape. The final sub-question of this study discusses the purpose of education as a method to facilitate empowerment. The literature shows that education is malleable and therefore the design and implementation of education will have a direct result on whether empowerment can be facilitated. In the case of the KGBV school model, it is noted that there was a conscious effort to the pedagogical design for empowerment – the evidence shows that the students experienced empowerment through the expansion of their voice, agency, bonds and self-reliance (Shah, 2011). This leads us to critically examine the current purpose of mainstream education.

4.6 Conclusion

The aim and objectives of this scoping review have been met as the primary ethos was to examine the evidence relating to current educational approaches that facilitate empowerment. To conclude on the findings, the literature presents a disjointed educational landscape with varying purposes. The answer to the scoping question of whether mainstream pedagogical approaches facilitate empowerment is both a yes and no, if non-formal and informal pedagogical approaches are taken into account. Our limited understanding of central issues such as happiness, health, wellbeing, are obscured by our exclusion of education in its fullest form. The contemporary mainstream educational approaches that facilitate empowerment are used on an ad hoc basis, and primarily found in the absence of rigid hierarchal curriculum structures (Wiggins, 2011). This study has been able to recapitulate these approaches, which are intertwined within the health and wellbeing of women and girls. The ‘humanness’ to learning is at the centre of the study’s findings: the confidence and self-reliance attributes to empowerment are cultivated through pedagogical approaches that facilitate strong peer and teacher bonds. This is reflective of mentor style teaching and participation which prompts self-reflection

as crucial (Shah, 2011). Social capital enables us to apply learning in action, and more importantly awards the ability to envision an alternative through the exposure to different settings and ideas, promoting entrepreneurial skills that are tied in with relevant education (Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013). I have identified gaps in current research and make recommendations regarding the need to increase future empirical evidence on indigenous practices to facilitate empowerment and promote health and wellbeing for girls, women and communities.

Our paternalistic approach to empowerment has meant that we lack a basic grasp of what is relevant and useful to communities. In essence, by our narrow application of education, we are moving away from the health and wellbeing aspects that should be the cornerstone of our education system. The findings establish concrete themes on disempowering educational approaches, most of which sit juxtaposed to empowerment. This study brings a depth to the overall global discussion on education and empowerment. Furthermore, it is the commonalities between women folk that embed community relevance and inclusion as missing pieces of the jigsaw.

This study aims to aid in identifying policy recommendations and curricular issues that are stifling the agency of women and girls. The monograde curriculum widely implemented in Sub-Saharan Africa, is argued to be exacerbating psychosocial issues in children, who are over-age students. The problematic aspects to education are tearing through as we see their applicability in a range of settings, that do not necessarily promote the wellbeing of their students (Lewin and Sabates, 2012). The voice of girls is missing in our understanding to what empowerment means. As the findings show, empowerment is a tightly knitted expansion of contributing to family and community stemming from the social and emotional aspect of humanity (Nussbaum, 2000). Research from the KGBV school model in Gujarat gives significant insight into the ontological understanding of empowerment. The study reports the importance of education to remain relevant, to cultivate friendships and supporting relations (Shah, 2011; Rodney, 1972).

The current climate of our society with the global pandemic is fertile ground to take a different approach to mainstream education. National governments hold power to facilitate the right funding and scalability of the pedagogies to facilitate empowerment. Large scale Education for All programmes are critically examined as failing students to some degree from disadvantaged backgrounds (Lewin and Sabates, 2012), bringing us back to the issue of relevance and adopting a one size fits all approach. Rigidity to formal education is stifling the potential to merge with non-formal education strategies highlighted from the scoping review's findings (Shah, 2011). This has been showcased in a very specific strategy that the KGBV school implemented, called 'Space,' that allowed for exactly that. 'Space' is a time when teachers connect with their students and learn in a creative manner that emerges from their environment and experience (Shah, 2016b).

There is a reference in the literature to technology and its potential to alleviate some of the issues which are persistent with formal mainstream education. Distance learning is highlighted as a potential solution in the publication by Nkechinyere Amadi (2011), who argues that quality education does not have to be compromised in rural schools in Sub-Saharan Africa due to remoteness. What the study has really extracted, is the irrelevance of whether it is digital or not – it is the fundamental purpose and pedagogical design to education that can direct digital education to facilitate empowerment. The author further goes on to identify the growing concern with the global learning crisis that the international community is attempting to combat. "Despite being in school, a large majority of learners do not acquire even minimal levels of learning and come out of school unprepared to integrate with the rapidly changing world" (Nkechinyere Amadi, 2011, p.986). The current discussions on gender-specific needs addresses more structural inequalities, like a preferential bias in the education system that caters more for boys than girls (Lewin and Sabates, 2012).

To conclude, there is a positive indication towards non-formal and informal education supporting the empowerment of women and girls. Furthermore, empowerment is characterised as an affirmation experienced as a process, one which is led by the individual, and stimulated by kinship (Jones, 2015). From the

onset, there are limitations in the findings because of the inflexibility and dominance of the current mainstream education system. To capture a richer understanding of the pedagogical approaches facilitating empowerment a separate narrative literature review is conducted to understand and examine the non-mainstream education approaches, including indigenous knowledge and informal education from a global context.

5 Narrative Literature Review: Ancient Pedagogical Approaches that Facilitate Empowerment

Knowledge, again, is inherent in [hu]man. No knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside. What we say a man “knows,” should, in strict psychological language, be what he “discovers” or “unveils”; what a man “learns” is really what he “discovers,” by taking the cover off his own soul, which is a mine of infinite knowledge.

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902)

5.1 Introduction

The anthropological accounts concerning education and empowerment are overshadowed by bodies of codified abstract knowledge conducted by experts (Kleinman, 1995). The narrative literature review seeks to unravel the thread that unites the human experience of empowerment beyond contemporary pedagogical approaches by examining ancient wisdom. The statistical data on global mainstream education highlights a failing system struggling to equip generations with the tools necessary to flourish (Nussbaum, 1997). Colonialization opaqued the rich ancient pedagogical approaches that weaved the social fabrics of ancient civilisations. Virtues of morality, oneness, longevity, bliss, love and a happy death colour the pages of ancient texts that understood humanity from the lens of introspection, self-governance and freedom (Vivekananda, 1989). The institutionalisation of mainstream education has segregated learning from a holistic everyday experience to a streamlined repetition and memorising exercise (Illich, 1970). In essence sacrificing critical thinking through experience (Nauriyal, Drummond, and Lal, 2006).

The scoping review and mapping of literature conducted showed gaps in the inclusion of traditional knowledge and the link to health and wellbeing. Due to this the review method is a narrative literature review adopting a comprehensive search methodology of ancient texts predating the Abrahamic religions. From a political perspective, the Abrahamic religions form the bedrock of Western society. Their

interpretations have subjugated girls and women, creating disparities between people based on externalities that camouflage our same sense of being (Ryser, 1997). The biblical story of Eve, who fell bondage to temptation symbolises a departure from a state of self-governance to one of ignorance from a lack of self-knowledge (Genesis 2:4–3:24). In the same manner, this chapter looks at principles of non-attachment and its relevance to modern society that is built on consumption, temptation and desire.

The narrative literature review critically examines a range of ancient wisdoms concerning empowerment, education, and health and wellbeing. Ancient wisdom encapsulates the religious and philosophical teachings of ancient civilisations that passed down experiential self-knowledge, self-transcendence, social, moral, ethical and non-attachment virtues, in the form of ancient texts, scrolls, parables and songs through generations (Jeste and Lee, 2019). The scoping review highlighted a need for a deeper appreciation of informal education and indigenous knowledge. The marginalisation of indigenous knowledge and practices reinforces the ignorant presumption that subsequently feeds into the exclusion of traditional knowledge from mainstream education. Against this backdrop, this narrative review draws on ancient wisdom.

Ancient wisdom has been conveyed formally and informally through oral narratives, cosmological observations, writings, planting and harvesting techniques, and healing and ritual practices (Bruchac, 2014). This narrative review looks at broadening its scope beyond the dominant reductive Eurocentric ideals on health, education, and empowerment. Ancient wisdom is founded on the premise of freeing and liberating human beings from bondage. Drawing the distinctions between wisdom and knowledge. From an *Upanishadic* philosophical perspective, wisdom is oneness with nature and the cosmos. The pursuit of knowledge is a motionless acquisition that blocks spirituality if introspection and awareness is missing; “He who worships ignorance enters into darkness and he who worships knowledge, who delights in knowledge alone, enters into greater darkness” (M, 2012, p.33).

Like the cross, wisdom represents the umbilical cord between our True Self *Atman* and the *Brahman* Supreme Reality; this self-realisation facilitates true empowerment. Knowledge is a secondary tool, sitting horizontally, its relevance occurs when it meets in the centre of wisdom, facilitating introspection (Peterson, 2018).

5.2 Aims and Objectives of the Narrative Literature Review

The aim and objectives of the narrative literature review are to analyse philosophies and ancient wisdoms marginalised by colonialism and neo-colonial projects that facilitate empowerment. The scoping review exposed gaps in knowledge regarding informal education concerning empowerment and wellbeing. As a result, informal education's potential is largely unknown, as it falls beyond the boundaries of curriculum and mainstream education (Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013). The pedagogical approaches which unite communities from the Global South lie deep in ancient wisdom. Such principles are passed down through spiritual rituals, culinary art, healing practices, songs and parables (Ngomane, 2019; Ferreira and Lang, 2005). This narrative review examines beyond traditional religious concepts, with an emphasis on introspection, life balance, teachings of inward reflection, and the use of ethnomedicine. The religious and philosophical concepts central to this narrative review are Hinduism, Ubuntu, Buddhism, Taoism, and Mayan philosophies. The major Abrahamic religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are not included in the literature synthesis. This is partly due to the interpretation and impact these religions have on society. As we look to examine beyond the contemporary pedagogical approaches, the inclusion of Abrahamic texts would affect the inquiry as they have shaped the foundations of modern and mainstream education and health structures. The dogmatic interpretations of these texts resemble similar frameworks that govern modern day institutions that limit exploration (Huq, 2005).

Irrespective of the benefit to individual religious fulfilment (Nussbaum, 2000), this narrative review's core objectives are firmly cemented in empowerment and wellbeing (Page and Czuba, 1999). In keeping true to this, any religious and

philosophical concepts founded on an external exploration of empowerment and wellbeing would hinder the aim and objectives of this narrative review. These are some of the central concepts which will be critically examined and are central to the work of scholars and philosophers such as Walter Rodney, Frantz Omar Fanon, Ivan Illich, Desmond Tutu, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Isabel Allende, Augusto Boal, Fidel Castro, Paulo Freire, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, and Edward Said, for example.

The research question of this narrative literature review is:

Can ancient pedagogical approaches be adapted to facilitate empowerment?

The following objectives support the aim of the review:

1. To analyse ancient pedagogical approaches and their interpretation of health and wellbeing with a particular focus on girls and women. This analysis will provide an insight into any common themes regarding ancient healing practices and the ontological and epistemological understanding of wellbeing within a community context, leading to a critical analysis of contemporary Western perspectives on health and empowerment from a local context.
2. To understand the ancient philosophical and spiritual concepts of empowerment with a focus on girls and women, facilitating a more in-depth examination of ancient culture and society, to elicit societal structures, hierarchies, and gender roles.
3. To examine ancient technology and its role in education, health, and empowerment. This critical examination centres around ancient wisdom on body mechanics and its impact on health and empowerment.

5.2.1 Can ancient pedagogical approaches be adapted to facilitate empowerment?

The narrative literature review is an annexation of the scoping review, seeking to examine concepts of wellbeing. Similar to how education has been separated into formal, non-formal, and informal, our understandings of health and empowerment have been equally fragmented, cultivating dependency and weakening human resilience and capabilities (Illich, 1978).

Furthermore, the objectives of the review seek to understand empowerment, which elicits a deep and critical discussion of bondage and freedom (Freire, 1972). This thesis argues femininity and masculinity as an intricate and intrinsic part of being (Peterson, 2018). This concept of wholeness and unity, balance and togetherness are taken into the critical examination of ancient technology and the impact on the human body. In addition, the objectives were further guided by the following research questions that are a continuation from the scoping review:

1. What is the ancient wisdom that promotes health and wellbeing?
2. What are the connecting concepts regarding pedagogy, health, and empowerment that run through the various ancient wisdoms?
3. What ancient technologies facilitate empowerment and promote health and wellbeing?
4. What is empowerment from an ancient philosophical and spiritual perspective?

5.3 Limitations

This narrative literature review depends on translations, seen as a limitation. The added layer of someone's subjective interpretation must be considered. This is also true of the interpretations of the Abrahamic religions, that have been largely implemented and taught oppressively. Ancient texts are profound and contemplative, and they span many different meanings and teachings from a simple parable or song. Ancient texts are also empowering pedagogies that were created to facilitate an individual's introspection and conjure transformation

(Vasudev, 2016; M, 2012; Kabat-Zin, 2003; Krishnamurti, 1978). The wisdom these texts impart have developed over the centuries and are immersed in indigenous practices. My ability to grasp its full meaning is limited due to the lack of previous exposure to non-Abrahamic spiritual and philosophical literature. Beyond the limitation of access, my indoctrination and framework, which restrict a deeper understanding of the literature reviewed, must be considered. The complex metaphors of Ancient Mayan texts are examples of my novice ability to capture all the subtle wisdom in their stories.

To conclude, the antiquity of the texts creates limitations in access, also the English language is a limitation in itself as it does not hold the right translation for all of the words. There are words in *Sanskrit* that do not hold the exact meaning in English, making the translation reductive. For example, *Prana* is not precisely 'breath.' It is the name for the energy that is in the universe (Vivekananda, no date). The Neopaganism of Europe were also not included in this narrative literature review, and it is argued that such texts would have reinforced the findings and therefore limited the geographical scope.

5.4 Narrative Literature Review Methodology

5.4.1 Protocol

The methodological framework of this narrative review took into account the recommended presentation, which is similar to any other review (Green, Johnson and Adams, 2006, p.106).

These 11 components are:

1. Title
2. Structured Abstract
3. Introduction
4. Methods
5. Discussion
6. Conclusion

7. Acknowledgements (If applicable)
8. References
9. Tables
10. Figures
11. Figure Captions

The narrative literature review is informed primarily by the general framework structure of narrative reviews (Ferrari, 2015; Green, Johnson and Adams, 2006). By adopting this model, the main body will be partitioned into sections composed of concepts. For this narrative review, the three overarching sections are:

1. Femininity – (Balance and in balance)
2. Pedagogy
3. Empowerment

5.4.2 Method

The exploratory nature of a narrative literature review provides broad coverage of the issues within a given topic (Collins and Fauser, 2005). Charting the landscape of ancient wisdom texts, scrolls, songs, and parables requires the malleability offered by conducting a traditional narrative review. Within these broad parameters, the intention is preserved to contribute coverage to the available literature on ancient wisdom (Sylvester, Tate and Johnstone, 2013; Baumeister and Leary, 1997). A narrative literature review was chosen because it enables a non-restrictive approach to build a cumulative research tradition of ancient philosophical and spiritual literature (Sylvester, Tate and Johnstone, 2013). In this, a systematic review would be burdensome and restrictive to present the full narrative thread at the core of ancient wisdom (Sylvester, Tate and Johnstone, 2013; Collins and Fauser, 2005). In being able to bring an ample coverage of the significant literature classified as ‘ancient,’ the substance of these teachings can be used to present a heterogenous review of literature that can generate fresh insights (Sylvester, Tate and Johnstone, 2013).

The narrative review adopts a qualitative interpretation. The ‘traditional’ way of reviewing literature, supporting a descriptive approach to eliciting theories and frameworks that lead to hypothesised conclusions (King and He, 2005). The interwoven theories found within ancient Hindu, Buddhist, African, Mayan, and Taoist philosophies were evaluated to draw conclusions from the existing conceptualizations (Baumeister and Leary, 1997). These ancient epistemologies that discuss moral, spiritual and ethical virtues have no limit regarding their depth or interpretation. The limitation rather lies with the researcher in their ability to comprehend its profundity. The arrival of different conclusions would add to the validity of these included studies without hindering the transparency and reproducibility of the narrative review (Collins and Fauser, 2005).

5.5 Analysis

This narrative literature review deals with large volumes of textual data. The broadness of the research question is well suited to adopting a qualitative content analysis as the method of analysis. The method of analysis offers flexibility to the researcher in terms of analysing a range of different texts (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). To reduce the data into concepts that describe the research phenomenon, a conceptual model that feeds into the overarching aim of the research to create a methodological framework of empowerment is needed (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008; Cavanagh, 1997). The core purpose in using concept analysis methodology is to distinguish the characteristics of each concept. Figure 12 shows the guiding research questions which serve as a direction in the open coding process. The coded text is colour coded as they offer possible insight into answering the four research questions that broadly overlook health, pedagogy, empowerment, and technology. It is, therefore, important to elicit the concepts which fall within the broader research phenomenon and define the emerging concept through their distinguished characteristics for both conceptual clarity, scientific literature, and for a broader methodological framework of what facilitates empowerment through education (Fitzpatrick and McCarthy, 2016). Figure 12 shows an inductive content analysis methodology, best suited to this narrative literature review, as there is no

prior operational knowledge (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). Due to the varied nature of the literature reviewed and the broad interpretations available, a continuum is needed, which tells a story when relaying the ancient wisdom (Bengtsson, 2016). The description of the text will be given and then a code name, then the categorization of the code, followed by a final grouping that will be presented within three sections femininity (balance), empowerment and pedagogy.

Creating categories during the abstraction process facilitates describing the phenomenon. Content analysis as a method permits the researcher through interpretation to decide which things to allocate in the same category (Dey, 1993). The abstraction process is storytelling, and the general description of the topic is created by generating categories (Burnard 1996; Robson, 1993). The software programme NVivo was used as a tool to help manage the data (Cavanagh, 1997).

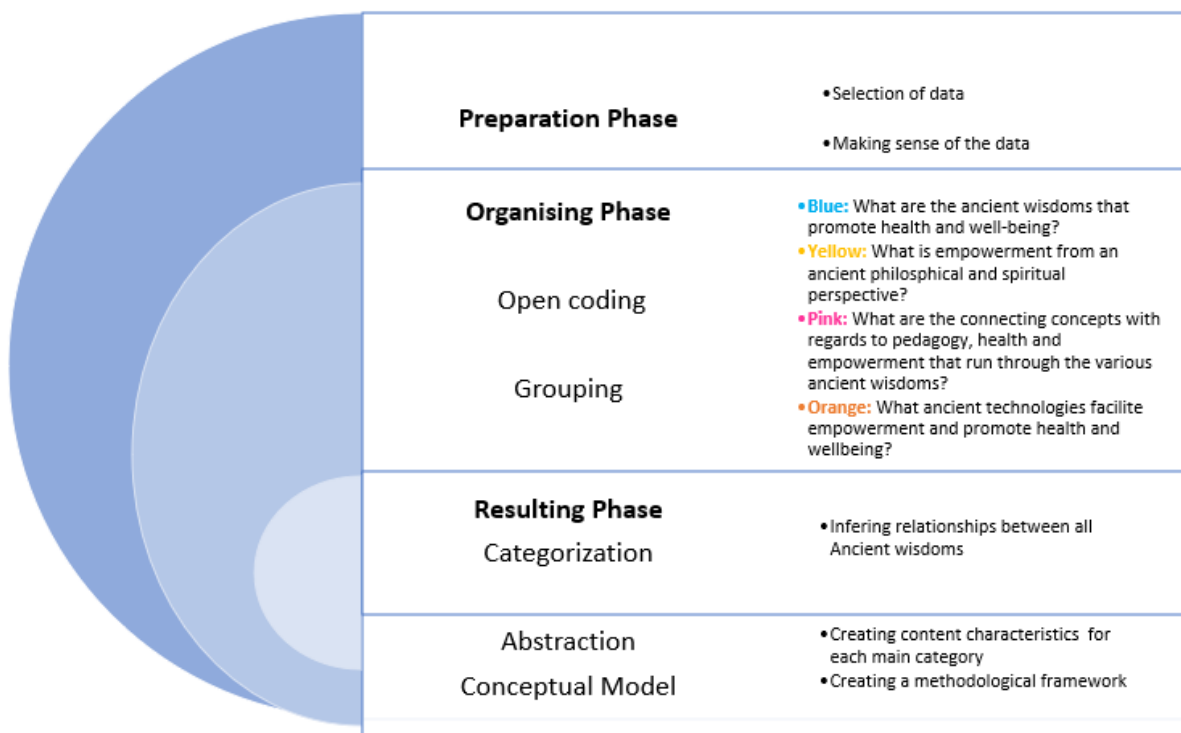


Figure 12 The preparation phase, organising phase, resulting phase.

5.6 Development of Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This narrative literature review's eligibility criteria was purposely broad to allow for the inclusion of ancient literature to be regarded as ancient wisdom. As shown in Figure 13, the exploration of literature fell within three main literature bodies: religious and philosophical, pedagogical, and educational, and health and wellbeing literature.

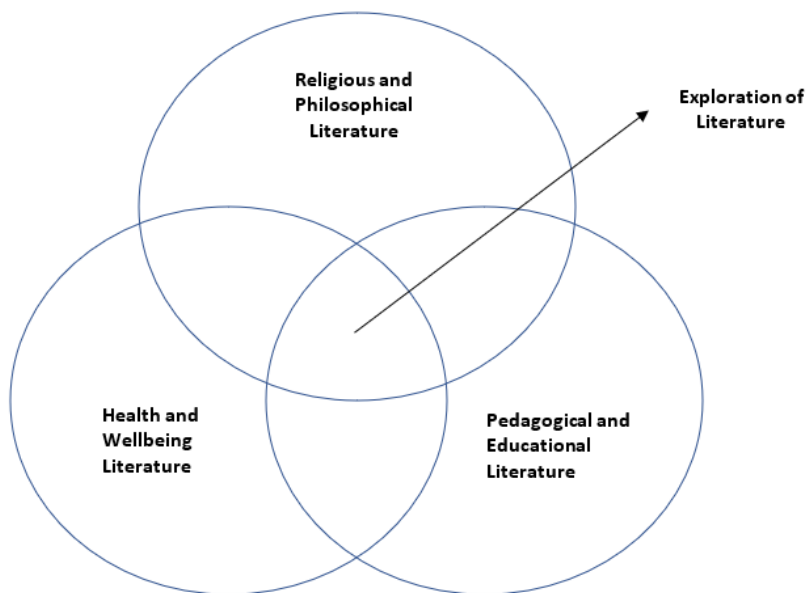


Figure 13 Exploration of the literature

5.6.1 Eligibility Criteria

Ancient literature that satisfied the following inclusion criteria were admitted:

Types of Ancient Wisdom: The narrative literature review's included ancient wisdoms whose philosophical and spiritual teachings centred around general knowledge of life, empathy, self-reflection, non-judgement, virtues of letting go, emotional regulation, and spiritual teachings. These core components are found in Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Ubuntu, Sufism, and Mayan ancient literature.

Representation Form: There were no restrictions on the representation form of these ancient texts.

5.6.2 Exclusion Criteria

Literature that had not been translated from the original texts into English and Spanish were excluded.

Literature pertaining to the Abrahamic religions were excluded. This exclusion was based on the strong foundation and influence these religions have had on modern and mainstream education and health. Their interpretation has also formed a strict framework for girls' and women's empowerment, shaping notions of paternalism, control, and obedience to one supreme God (Shiva, 1999).

5.6.3 Search Strategy

The search strategy primarily aimed to describe the operational aspects of the reviewed literature. The predetermined eligibility criteria were applied to the following searches. shows how the reviewed literature is distinguished by type and category. This facilitates the analysis of the reviewed literature by setting clear objectives within the preparation and organising phase and strengthening the content analysis methodology with regards to transparency, validity, and reproducibility.

Table 6 Category and types of literature.

<i>Types/Categories</i>	<i>Hinduism</i>	<i>Buddhism</i>	<i>Daoism</i>	<i>Ubuntu</i>	<i>Mayan</i>
Religious and Philosophical	Bhagavadgita	Dhammapada	Tao Te Ching	The African Ubuntu Philosophy	Popol Vuh
	Patanjali Yoga Sutras	Pali Canon			
	Swami Vivekananda Compilation				
	Pantanjali Yoga Sutras Swami Vivekananda				
	Nirvana Shatakam				
Pedagogical and Educational	The Essence of Mundaka Upanishad	Lotus Sutra		Ubuntu and Pedagogy	
		60 Songs of Milarepa		What is Ubuntu? Different Interpretations among South Africans of African Descent	
		Women in Early Buddhist Literature		This Significance of the Concept of Ubuntu	
		Buddhist Thought and Applied Psychological Research			
		The Buddha's Teaching Methodology			
		Saddharma Pundarika or, The Lotus of the True Law			
		The Buddha and His Teachings – Venerable Narada Mahathera			
Health and Wellbeing	Charaka Samhita	Vipassana Meditation	Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine	The Ubuntu Concept of Good Life	

<i>Types/Categories</i>	<i>Hinduism</i>	<i>Buddhism</i>	<i>Daoism</i>	<i>Ubuntu</i>	<i>Mayan</i>
	Hatha Yoga Pradipika of Svamarama	Practical Vipassana Exercises			

5.7 Findings and Discussion

5.7.1 Introduction

The endless pursuit of happiness is a shared battle that we can only end when we enter into an authentic and meaningful relationship with our inner self (M, 2012; Rinpoche, 2008; Nussbaum, 1997). Ancient wisdom sits like an old wise majestic tree; its roots penetrate deep in the soil. Its branches spurt in different directions, reaching high and wide, offering shelter. The ancient wisdom in Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Ancient Mayan are like branches. And although each branch is distinctive, they are united by a shared root. In the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1863 – 1902), every religion stems from a same God. Vivekananda argues that like a seed, ‘truth’ is planted and blooms according to its natural growth order. It breathes the same air, receives the same water, and is embedded in the same soil. So do the natural variations of culture that cause the varied adaptations to the teachings that we find in ancient wisdom. Still, the ultimate unifying teaching at the heart of wisdom directs humanity in becoming one with universal consciousness.

Of the 27 texts included in this narrative review, there emerged three theme classifications. Nine main themes emerged on empowering pedagogical approaches and health and wellbeing, one main theme on disempowerment with a final compilation of 44 sub-themes.

1. Femininity
2. Pedagogy
3. Empowerment

NVivo 12 Pro was used to create the coding for this narrative literature review following the four aiding research questions. The coding was not specific to the different spiritual and philosophical categories, as the narrative synthesis showed there is an extensive overlapping in themes and sub-themes throughout the various ancient wisdoms. Three classifications emerged from the aiding research questions capturing the central thesis’s overarching inquiry. The research aims and objectives centre on girls’ and women’s empowerment through education

from an uneven context. From an ancient perspective, there is no divide between woman and man; equality flows from the '*Ishavasyam idam sarvam*' – 'That which is everywhere, at all times' (M, 2012). As 'beings,' our true *atam* or self, is in unity with the universal consciousness, described in the Upanishad as the Supreme *Brahman*. Therefore, the term femininity is not to be misunderstood as referring to the woman, but rather it is the energy of creation – the life force, Mother Earth from which life abounds (Veith, 1949). It is the form of consciousness and bliss also understood as the eternal *Shiva* (Shankaracharya, 788 CE -820 CE). The second classification, pedagogy, is the teaching of the self. The acquisition of knowledge is only secondary to the contemplation of your inner being (Niwano, 1989). The final categorisation of empowerment is an altered sense of awareness, which is the ultimate path to ancient wisdom.

The different 'nodes' represented with different colours relate to the theme classifications. To show the overlapping themes and the intricate relationship between the sub-themes and different religious texts, a mind map was developed alongside the coding. The themes sit in the various classifications, but this does not mean the discussion is linear, rather there are many interlinkages between the classification and themes. The nine emerging themes and sub-themes are:

1) Case Classification: Femininity – Seeking Balanced Human beings

- i) Cyclicity of Life
 - (1) Consciousness
 - (2) Karma
 - (3) Habit formation
 - (4) Suffering
 - (5) Manifestation
 - (6) Samsara
- ii) Self-Governance
 - (1) Eating with awareness
 - (2) Fasting
 - (3) Health
 - (4) Yogic lifestyle

- (5) Control of energy flow
- (6) Virtues
- (7) Non-violence
- b) Balance
 - (1) Wellbeing
 - (2) Chinese traditional medicine
 - (3) Elements
 - (4) Good life and death
 - (5) Healers
 - (6) Spirituality
 - (7) Supple
- c) Lifestyle Practices
 - (1) Meditation
 - (2) Samadhi–tranquillity
 - (3) Mindfulness
- d) Oneness
 - (1) Buddhism
 - (2) Hinduism
 - (3) Ubuntu
 - (4) Altruism
 - (5) Love and compassion
 - (6) Equality
- 2) Case Classification: Pedagogy
 - a) Teachings
 - (1) Enlightenment
 - (2) Role models
 - b) Introspection
 - (1) Self-realisation
 - (2) Self-reliance
 - (3) Truth
 - (4) Experience
 - (5) Wisdom

- 3) Case Classification: Empowerment
 - a) Freedom & Liberation
 - b) Virtue of non-attachment
 - c) Bliss
- 4) Disempowerment
 - (1) External attachment
 - (2) Bondage
 - (3) Crave
 - (4) Labouring for external gratification
 - (5) Individualism
 - (6) Ignorance

5.8 Part 1: Femininity – Seeking Balanced Human Beings

The cyclicity of life is a profound theme that weaves through the various ancient wisdoms. Intertwining through freedom and bondage, matter, and spirituality. Its unifying dimensions keep us captive to one another and nature. In the same way that our planet orbits around the sun, our bodies fall within these rhythmic cycles. The two cosmic regulators of the yin and yang are the unifying theme of *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* (1949), a symbolic illustration of all happenings in human life and nature.

The ways of yin and yang are to the left and to the right. Water and fire are the symbols of yin and yang. Yin and yang are the source of power and the bringing of everything in creation. Yang ascends to Heaven; yin descends to Earth. Hence the universe (Heaven and Earth) represents motion and rest, controlled by the wisdom of nature. Nature grants the power to beget and to grow to harvest and to store, to finish, and to begin anew (Veith, 1949, p.15)

Yin and yang, two interdependent and amalgamated states, balance one another; “within yang, there was contained yin and within yin there was contained yang” (Veith, 1949, p.15). Similarly, from an Abrahamic religious standpoint, Eve came forth from Adam (Genesis 2:21–22). The human embodies both the yang that

belongs to the male and the yin that belongs to the female. From an ancient perspective, the masculine and feminine are in perfect harmony. Compared to a modern view of equality, the male and female lie as separate entities; this separation of self is the embodiment of individualism, giving rise to an internal conflict and imbalance. As argued by Kleinman (1995), biomedicine's dominant orientation is to view patients as isolated beings, treating their organisms in isolation, cutting off community, and spirituality. From an African philosophical perspective, *Ubuntu* transcends our shared understanding of altruistic feelings. The concept of cyclicity is 'being' through others (Ngomane, 2019). A metaphysical dimension connects the living indigenous African to their dead ancestors, guiding their actions on Earth (Zulu, 2018). The *Bhagavad Gita* (1963: lines 42 -43) illustrates the spiritual connectivity with the natural world as manifested by offerings required for deceased ancestors' welfare. It depicts a delicate balance synchronised through the cyclicity of life in the material and the spiritual. There is an ancient universal understanding of consciousness which is central to life's cyclicity. The mantra of the Ishavasya Upanishad;

Purnamadah purnamidam purnat purnamudachyat

Purnasya purnamaadaya purnamevashishyate

(That is complete, this is complete. From that completeness comes this completeness. If we take away this completeness from that completeness only completeness remains.) (M, 2012, p.4).

This mantra removes the veil of separation we so firmly cling to; consciousness is the completeness with that Supreme *Brahman* – it is the completion of becoming. Therefore, there is no differentiation between your inner being and universal consciousness because you become one. From an ancient perspective, there is a fundamental understanding of the different states of consciousness. Our awakened state is the lower rung of the ladder, governed by our senses, followed by our dream state, which bears no continuity. The *Bhagavad Gita* describes this as adopting the *manas*, which if united with *buddhi*, - that which grants bliss away from the ego. Fourthly, it is the synchronisation by *buddhi* and the light from beyond the self, transcendental completeness (Radharkrishnan, 1963,

p.150). Similarly, the people from the classical Mayan era depicted this same notion of consciousness through various development stages, illustrated through four key ideograms representing this transformation. Figure 14 shows the cyclical nature of development. Each stage flows from one another, suggesting a continuous motion of progress.

The evolutionary process of the human brain depicts three different mentalities; the reptilian brain, paleomammalian brain (limbic system), and the mammalian brain. And although they are radically different in structure and chemistry, they have developed interconnections that influence one another (MacLean, 1978). The reptilian brain controls the primal patterns of behaviour such as mating, defence, foraging etc., and the body's vital functions (Argüelles, 1987; MacLean, 1978). Figure 14 shows the *chicchan* ideogram that depicts a serpent representing the reptilian brain, the physicality of our being. From a Buddhist perspective, this is the perceptual consciousness of the senses, our five functions of vision, hearing, smell, touch and taste (Nauriyal, Drummond, and Lal, 2006). The *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* (400BC – 300 AD: lines: 17 -18) defines our experience based on our level of consciousness. On a higher level of consciousness, the *OC*, mammalian brain is the emotional circuit of conscience, nurture, and love, hence the parent-offspring imagery (Argüelles, 1987). At this level of consciousness, our behaviour remains controlled by the often unconscious judgements we make governed by emotion (MacLean, 1978). As Vivekananda (1989) argues, bondage remains in the presence of emotion, be it anger, fear, joy, or anxiety. Any disturbances to our mind create a dependency that is, in essence, disempowerment as we fail to control our circumstances (Page and Czuba, 1999). The higher collective mind that gravitates in the fulfilment stage as depicted in Figure 14 of *MEN*, can be scientifically understood as the neocortex, where abstract thought, imagination, and consciousness resides. Its malleability and infinite learning abilities distinguish it from its more primitive siblings (MacLean, 1978). Despite the technological advancement of our modern era, there remains the inability to fully comprehend and subdue the most powerful machine to have ever existed, our mind. In the yogic understanding, there are four categories of dimensions, the final

step of the mind: the *chitta* is the umbilical cord to the essence of creation within. Once accessing your *chitta*, every dimension works for your benefit, bringing forth a perfect state of tranquillity (Sadhguru, 2021). When in a state of distraction, we remain further away from having real knowledge of ourselves (Vivekananda, 1989; Radharkrishnan, 1963). As understood from a yogic perspective, the fourth ideogram shown in Figure 14 is the AHAU, described in the *Bhagavad Gita* (1963) as the ability to live in the consciousness of the spirit, thus remaining in a state of Nirvana – bliss in an awakened state – the fullest fulfilment stage of oneness with universal consciousness (Argüelles, 1987).

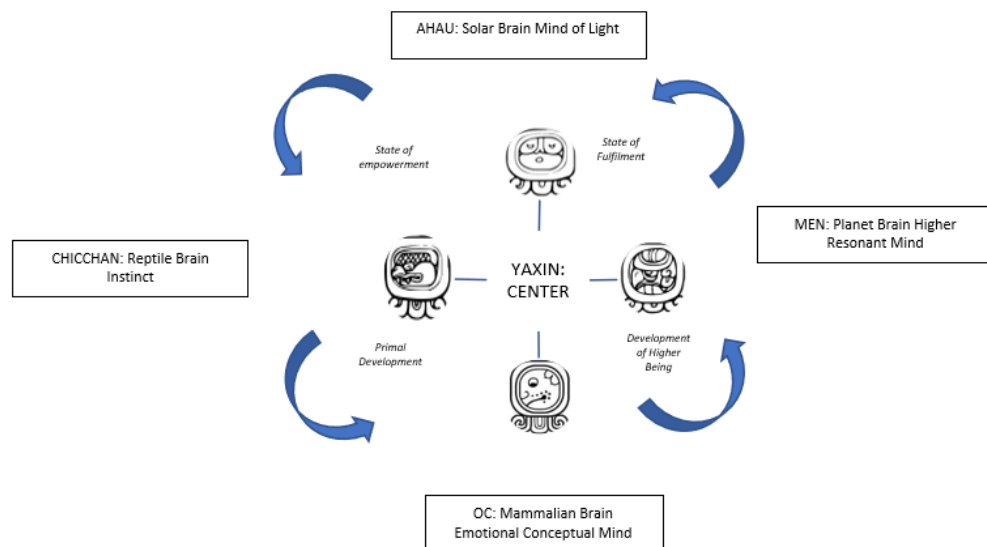


Figure 14 Adaptation of the inner wheel of meaning (Source: Argüelles, 1987, p.104).

Similarly, from an Ancient Mayan perspective, The *Popol Vuh* which is described as meaning ‘word’ itself, recants the tales of their gods, heroes, and past rulers of the Quiché nation. There is a sacredness to these declarations as they act and ground humanity with a notion of belonging. The tale of the deity twin heroes ‘Hunahpu and Xbalanque,’ depicts two mischievous protagonists acting under the instruction of the god, Heart of Sky, called *Huracan* (Christenson, 2003, p.70, lines: 183–189). The concept of individualism has influenced our modern visualisation of

life. The pursuit of happiness has taken the form of an endless linear projection. As argued by Vivekananda (1989), we strive towards never-ending goals that promise freedom. Our re-definition of life has jarred movement, which is only present in the rotation of life. From a pedagogical perspective, the bedrock that provides direction and purpose is skewed, suggesting ignorance in understanding the mechanics of being.

Furthermore, this principle gives rise to the ethical theory that you must love, as everything that leaves will come back in full force (Vivekananda, 1989). The descriptive accounts about the Buddha are not examples of unobtainable holiness but are instead the opposite. They describe a man who sought to conquer truth and experimented in this internal quest. His conduct is not a result of divine intervention but human effort. Therefore in the absence of dogma, the Buddha's teaching coerces tolerance; these are the fruits born from internal changes that take on external manifestations and allow you to 'become' (Radhakrishnana, 1950). One of the stories about the Buddha as he walks by a town with his alms bowl describes 'self-governance', a core theme in this review. As the Buddha walks by, a man hurls abuse on one of his rounds. Buddha responds with a parable and says to the man, 'If a beggar refuses to accept the food given to him, who does the food then belong to?' The man responds, well the food goes back to the householder.' Buddha breaks down the parable and explains that just like the beggar who refuses to accept the food, he too refuses to accept abuse, and like the food, the abuse returns back to the source as part of a karmic law (Radhakrishnana, 1950, p.13).

From an Ubuntu lens, karmic law is understood by the view of humanity as an integral component of a sophisticated ecosystem (Msengana, 2006). The applicability of this teaching in a modern context relates to a developed sense of responsibility, an interconnected state that lies in stark contrast with what psychologists identify as a 'tendency of interpersonal victimhood,' a moral elitism, inflexibility which separates and isolates (Kaufman, 2020). The cyclical understanding of life awakens those that journey through as if it were inconsequential. The wisdom from the 60 songs of Milarepa (1997), is a life manual in verse and song; it talks about life as a journey, a fleeting one compared to the

next. Perseverance, diligence, and hard work are among the qualities that one needs to journey well. Milarepa tantalises the reader with straightforward questions:

Do you yet know that your enemies are laziness and caprice?

If you understand my words, you should cast them both away.
(Khantipālo, 1997, pp.145–146).

In the simplicity of ancient wisdom lies the complexity in learning to contemplate. Laziness and caprice are mental dispositions that cause suffering. Formal education is emphatically an external knowledge consuming exercise that prevents the contemplation of the inner self (Nussbaum, 1997; Illich, 1978, 1970; Freire, 1972). From an ancient wisdom perspective Figure 15 sets the nature of contemplation as distinct from learning. Learning is understood as an experience that is beyond training (*gaku*) the mind, to reach a trained (*mugaku*) mind – a state of enlightenment (Niwano, 1989; Radhakrishnana, 1950). Figure 15 characterises contemplation as an internal appreciation of life as we experience it, from the mechanics of our breathing to our emotions, that give meaning to phenomena. In the mind's emptiness, contemplation can expand into visualisation, subjecting us to peace (Kumārajiva Kubo and Yuyama, 2007; Mahathera, 1998).

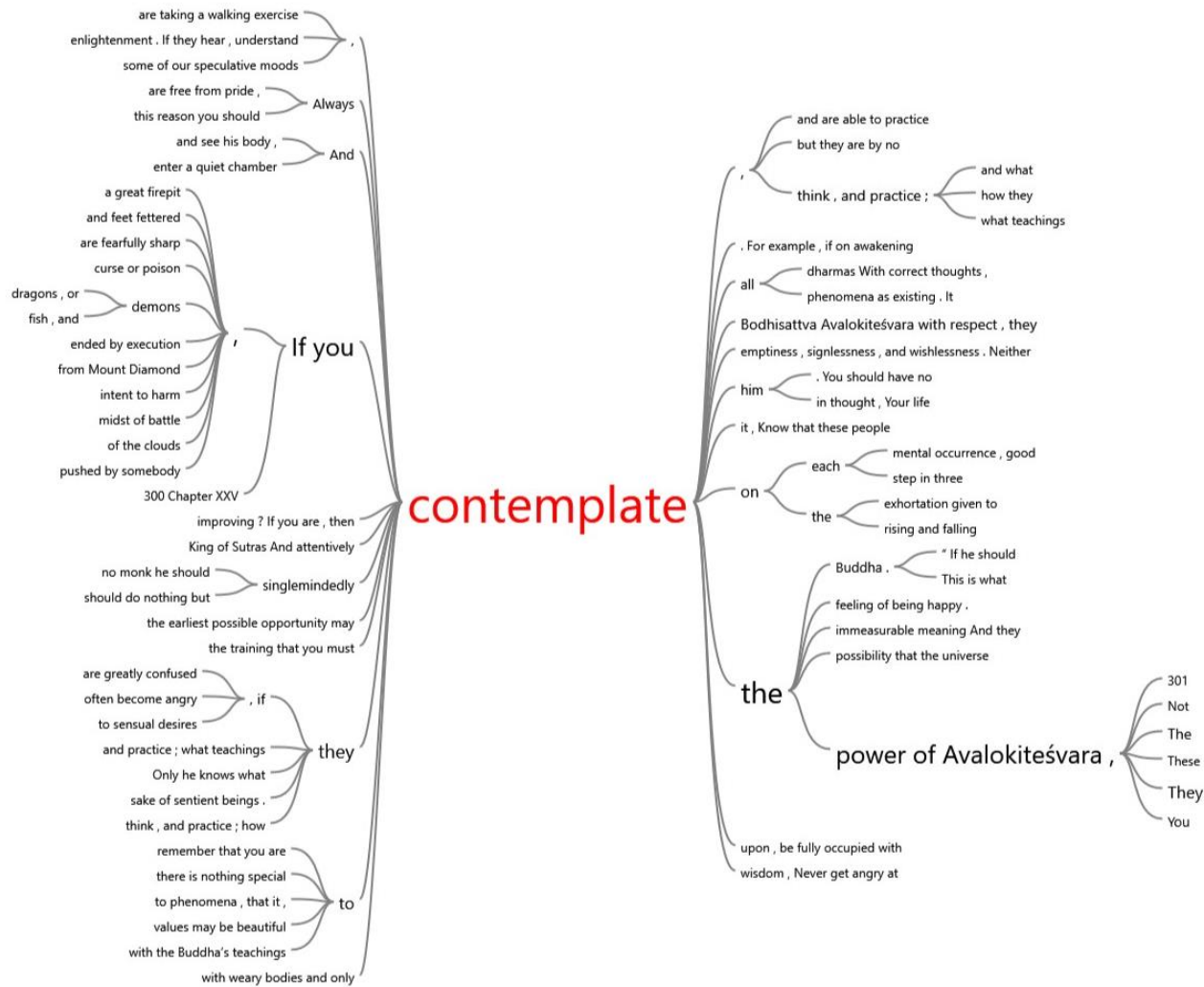


Figure 15 Word tree diagram on contemplation.

Ancient wisdom is coloured with empowerment; the Vedic religion defines karma from the Sanskrit, meaning 'act' (Pai, 2019). As we immerse in this state of individualism, we act accordingly, deciding between right and wrong from a limited perspective. From an African philosophical perspective, we are subhuman, unable to comprehend humanness as we live separated from others (Zulu, 2018; Assie-Lumumba, 2017; Msengana, 2006). Furthermore, this lack of perception is indicative of acting without awareness. Karma is a principle of action and consequence that spares none; "In a word, he, 'the being,' is responsible for his own Samsara – not his mother or his father or brother or sister, or his friends and acquaintances" (Horner, 1961, p.6). From an empowerment perspective, ancient wisdom only leads to full ownership of self, dependent on introspection. There is no room for an excuse by this logic, as we are enough, and capable of ending our suffering. The story of *Hansel and Greta* is a fascinating analogy of chasing external wealth and riches in search of joy (Peterson, 2018). Karma and *Samsara* sit by mocking humans like child's play knowing that wealth is seldom enjoyed (Khantipālo, 1997).

From our state of consciousness habit formation emerges which develops into tendencies (Nauriyal, Drummond and Lal, 2006). Past, present and future are linked by karma, in this, empowerment is taking control of that karma which has not yet manifested (Vivekananda, no date). Following on from the concepts of self-governance the Buddha's life resembles such a journey, his life was a series of experiments as he moved away from coercion or compulsion (Radhakrishnana, 1950). By imparting this understanding any misconceptions of divinity are removed; ordinary men like Gandhi (1869 – 1944) and Martin Luther King (1929 – 1968) they too challenged the status-quo as they sought to seek the truth, carving out a path of empowerment that created ripples across the world. Buddhist teachings are about transformation, which draw some parallel to the teachings of Jesus: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans, 12:2). In taking back control of the mind the state of tranquillity, another overarching theme transpires: Vivekananda (1989: 12) argues that habit

formation is the result of impressions that mark our mind, like ripples on a lake. In line with this thinking, many of our daily impressions are based on judgements of good and bad. These findings are interlinked and the common underpinning is self-governance.

The virtue of discipline is a significant theme from the narrative literature review's abstraction process, that defines empowerment as an internal process. This code was re-named to self-governance as there are different connotations to discipline from a modern context. This is a crucial example of the political and legal influences injected into contemporary society by the Abrahamic religions. Discipline is understood as an external exercise of obedience to an authoritative figure. The understanding of discipline from an ancient perspective teaches this virtue as an internal governance force. The virtue of discipline is always an internal devotion and commitment to oneself. Similarly, ancient texts point to inertia and slackness as enemies which hold us back – and subsequently these are wellbeing aspects that need an internal solution (Khantipālo, 1997). Similarly, the Ayurvedic viewpoint links inertia from a food intake and preparation perspective. Thus, further showing that everything is interconnected. *Tamas*, which translates to 'inertia, dullness, sleep, darkness' can be the effect of tamasic food that lacks *prana* – life source energy, acting as a sedative and unbalancing the body's immune system (Loon, 2003, p.38). The Ayurvedic teaches us self-governance in terms of our consumption and controlled portions that have the right balance between *Rajasic* foods – 'momentum, desire, action' and tamasic foods (Loon, 2003, p.38). Contrary to modern health approaches, the Ayurvedic does not categorise tamasic food as either good or bad. The Ayurvedic underlines the consequences if our diet becomes unbalanced; for example, tamasic food can help balance our internal stability when our mind is hyper because of excess *rajas*, also shown in

Figure 16 (Sivan, 2013). For optimal body functioning, ancient wisdom teaches us to eat with awareness and understand our bodies, ensuring we are perfectly balanced *Sattva*. Our relationship with food has changed drastically. The modern-day approach to food has transformed eating into a commodity and

sensory experience. It is no longer a medicinal and spiritual component that we interact with: eating has become habitual regardless of whether our bodies are hungry (Iyengar and Taty, 2003). According to the yogic lifestyle, the stomach should remain one-fourth free as an offering to *Shiva*, (Iyengar and Taty, 2003). Both from an Indian and Chinese science of healing, the natural flow of energy needs to pass through the body without a blockage from overeating. Buddhism similarly teaches the awareness of eating, to contemplate every detail of eating (Ven, no date).

As shown in Figure 16, health takes on a different meaning if guided by ancient principles. Modern-day food consumption consists mainly of a tamasic diet that includes; bread, pastries, alcohol, meat fish, microwaved food, overripe and underripe fruits and vegetables (Sivan, 2013). From an Ayurvedic health perspective, tamasic food brings about sluggish thinking, stagnating our state of consciousness and illumination, bringing about mood swings, craving and irritability (Demir et al., 2019; Pidgeon, 2016; Sivan, 2013; Vivekananda, 1989; Rao, no date).

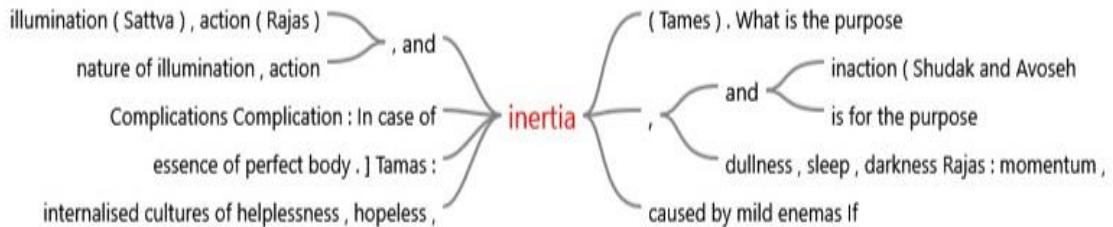


Figure 16 Word tree of inertia, showing the relationship between Tames, Rajas, and Sattva.

The story of *Indra* (the god of gods) recounts how he became a pig and wanted nothing more but to remain a pig but was set free by the other gods who ripped his pig body open. Realising the captive state that he had been in, he began to laugh and think that pig-life was the only life to have, forgetting godly nature.

Similarly, our bodies can facilitate the expansion of our being, or we can forget that our *Purusha* is not nature but infinite and pure (Vivekananda, 1989, Line: 18). From an ancient perspective, there is no divide between food, seasons, spirituality, and universal consciousness. In a similar way an ancient Mayan story tells of Lady Blood, who is asked to gather maize for the family to prove her worth and ability and given a great net to contain the food. The pattern of the net symbolises the regularity of the seasons of the time, uniting the natural with the order of the universe (Christenson, 2003, p.122). Fasting is an essential purification and regenerative practice found throughout ancient practices. Through fasting, Buddha entered into deep contemplation (Mahathera, 1998); similarly, Jesus fasted in the desert and embarked on a spiritual battle, indicating the intrinsic relationship between food, physical wellbeing and spirituality (Matthew 4:1). The Ayurvedic indicates fasting is a time to increase inner contemplation and reduce external pleasure. From a health perspective, fasting is a purging treatment best done in spring when the body is naturally undergoing a purification process to eliminate accumulated *Kapha* – the energy of lubrication and structure (phlegm) (Loon, 2003).

One of the core principles to self-govern is dominion over the senses. Chinese traditional medicine carries over the relationship between Yin and Yang as light and darkness into the physical healing and the structure of humans found in the *Nei Ching*. Yang is active on the outside corresponding to the human body's external surface, and yin on the interior; both are present in one another and act as respective regulators (Veith, 1949). Similarly, both Indian and Chinese traditional medicine adopt a subdivision scheme. The Ayurveda and the three-dosha theory, defines the three fundamental bodily bio-elements *dosha as an exercise of balance: Vata* (wind), *Pitta* (bile), and *Kapha* (watery element). For example, from a traditional Chinese perspective, there are three main subdivisions for yin and yang (see Figure 17).

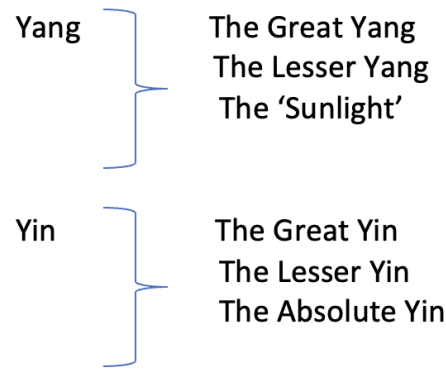


Figure 17 Subdivisions of yin and yang.

It must be noted that this compartmentalisation is in no way a division. Both yin and yang are an amalgamation representing organs closely connected, purporting harmony to the human body (Veith, 1949, p.16). Health and disease can therefore be understood as emanating from the same source, and when unbalanced causes disorder and when balanced, is regenerative (Loon, 2003; Rao, no date).

Yoga is an ancient technology to readdress the flow of energy (Iyengar and Taty, 2003). Modern application of yoga follows a Western categorisation approach, as yoga is largely seen as an external activity. From a traditional understanding there is an initiation to yoga and a structure that is necessary to unlock yoga as an internal process. The yogic lifestyle accompanies an internal discipline or self-governance that is not merely the mastery of the physical exercise but the ability to control the senses, and quiet the mind. It is an inner technology that manifests in external positions, contrary to the modern approach focused on the external mastery forgetting the internal discipline (Iyengar and Taty, 2003). This ancient technology establishes the importance of initiation and the respect and care between master and student, giving a glimpse of a genuine humility to learning. From a yogic perspective, being still, Asana, comes before being taught to breathe (life's breath) – Prāṇāyāma. The immobility is mental, as though divesting energy (Iyengar and Taty, 2003). In assessing whether ancient technologies and pedagogical approaches are relevant in modern society a randomised controlled

trial on secondary school students, who took an 11-week yoga session found that yoga had positive effects on students. Students reported a decline in mood, anxiety, better control of anger and less inertia (Khalsa et al., 2012). Yoga from a health perspective, releases our inner being from the bondage of sensation, understood as *Moksa - complete oneness* (Loon, 2003). The yogi is the harmonic relationship between sleep, wakefulness, exercise and diet (Vivekananda, 1989). From a Hindu lens, the findings on internal technologies discusses yoga as a wisdom that connects your being with Brahman (Vivekananda, no date). From a health perspective, Asana – a meditative sitting state – stimulates the free flow of energy that provides health and suppleness (Iyengar and Taty, 2003). Creating wellbeing from a yogic understanding is a holistic endeavour. Wellbeing cannot be achieved independently from the spiritual, mental, and physical suppleness obtained by self-governance. The breathing retention of life force control, *Kevala Kumbhaka*, is the most advanced breathing exercise *Pranayama* achievable, where you spontaneously control energy. The internal workings of this exercise are to achieve thoughtlessness, *Unmani*, and enter a state of contemplation, *Samadh*.

The Contemporary international health and development agencies' understanding of wellbeing is subject to quantifying morbidity rates that serve the international community's bureaucratic purpose. This quantitative approach to measuring wellbeing is removed from the local anthropological sources that hold rich qualitative data of markers beyond mortality that make up wellbeing (Kleinman, 2006). From an ancient wisdom perspective, there is no distinction between mental health and physical health. On the other hand, to have an International Mental Health Day indicates a compartmentalised approach to wellbeing. Morality can be understood as a concept deeply rooted in love and or one of duty "One should not behave towards others in a way which is disagreeable to oneself" (Radhakrishnana, 1950, p.103). The ancient philosophies that are examined in this narrative literature review oscillate towards the grounding of care. The essence of Buddhism draws striking parallels to Ubuntu: these philosophies transcend the altruistic and are expressions of your inner-makeup (Ngomane, 2019; Zulu, 2018; Msengana, 2006). Christianity also speaks of the virtue of care, sacrifice,

and love, with the famous verse: ‘Love thy neighbour as thyself’ (Matthew 22:39). However, there remains a distinction between the Abrahamic religions and those of greater antiquity. Time is an essential factor that allows humans to incorporate teachings into deep ontologies and epistemologies (Vivekananda, 1989). From a Christian perspective, the virtue of love has been equally interpreted alongside punishment by applying an external morality, giving people a sense of moral superiority (Gandhi, 2001). The natural evolution of ancient virtues has led to an innate sense of sacrifice or deeds to people and gods (Pai, 2019; Rao, no date). In this, non-violence stems from these virtues of love and compassion, and it is a rebellion from love and empowerment laced with self-governance and control (Gandhi, 2001).

Keeping an equilibrium and internal balance is a dominant theme throughout the findings of the narrative literature review. For clarity’s sake, there is a profound understanding of mental wellbeing. As an example, disease is defined according to unhappiness (Loon, 2003). Unhappiness is the manifestation of disequilibrium of the seven Dhatus – the seven primary bodily tissues (Loon, 2003). Figure 18 shows the cyclicity of life as a component of balance present in ancient healing practices. From a modern lens, Figure 18 is a diagram of health’s physiological aspects, but as taught by the Ayurveda, the physical represents the mind’s state and the mind of the spirit (Loon, 2003, p.13). Similarly, the traditional Chinese medicine of acupuncture is grounded in the interconnectedness of the human body. In the Chinese theory of angiology there is a fixed relationship between the organs. The needles used in ancient acupuncture were made from different metals bringing into the mix the significance of the elements (Veith, 1949). From the Yin-Yang point of view, the different elements were charged with the two different energies depending on the ailment to bring equilibrium (Veith, 1949, p.65). Figure 18 shows a similarity between these two ancient medicines with a universal understanding of the body and the elements equally represented by the three *doshas*.

The purpose of balance is to reach suppleness; this same suppleness of the mind is achieved through meditation and obtaining *samadhi* – a blissful oneness

(Kumārajīva, Kubo and Yuyama, 2007; Nauriyal, Drummond and Lal, 2006; Khantipālo, 1997; Radharkrishnan, 1963). The narrative literature reviews' findings position happiness, health, balance, freedom, self-governance as internal qualities, which lies at odds with modern perceptions that seek external technologies and methods to achieve these states momentarily. Modern science is enquiring more into the effects of internal technologies and wellbeing, for example, studies of the brain on participants who enter prayer and meditation show that the brain's prefrontal regions are activated. The superior parietal lobes and temporoparietal junction quieten, sedating the visual auditory and somatosensory systems (Jeste and Lee, 2019). This serenity which is experienced through prayer and meditation is also prominent throughout the ancient Maya literature. Meditation seizes suffering, which is only internal (*The Yoga Sutras of Pantanjali*, no date). Meditation as a technology becomes more advanced the more it is practiced: from a self-governance perspective, meditation allows one to develop greater self-control over feelings and emotions (Vivekananda, no date). Similarly, the Buddha's teachings on meditation compare it to a Lotus. Lotuses lie on, above and below the water; likewise, our ability to meditate sits at different levels, and it needs an individualised approach (Mahathera, 1998). There is no definition of 'soul' from a biomedical lens, which is a limitation when analysing the literature around meditation and mindfulness. Research has shown evidence from brain scans highlighting that when people enter a meditative state, the pineal area activates: "the pineal gland could be the seat of 'spirituality'", 2007). Meditation and mindfulness are all branches from the learning of contemplation:

Right mindfulness is to look on the body and the spirit in such a way as to remain self – and mindful, overcoming both hankering, and dejection. It is self-mastery by means of self-knowledge which allows nothing to be done mechanically or heedlessly. It is to see things under the aspect of eternity (Radharkrishnana, 1950, p.21).

Being present and aware are a cornerstone of ancient wisdom. We have witnessed a resurgence in meditation and mindfulness going mainstream (Purser, 2019). Even though the health benefits are being felt, there is a large disconnect

from these technologies' real purposes and the modern interpretation. Capitalism and colonialism to a degree make up the modern-day backdrop. The extraction of self-governance, love, introspection and the virtue of non-attachment leave the modern experience of meditation and mindfulness to its bare minimum (Radhakrishnana, 1950, p.65). From an ancient perspective, pain and suffering are not bad; they are necessary. This is at odds with modern relations of suffering, but through mindfulness our *prana* – life force, connects to a higher consciousness as shown in Figure 18 (Ven, no date).

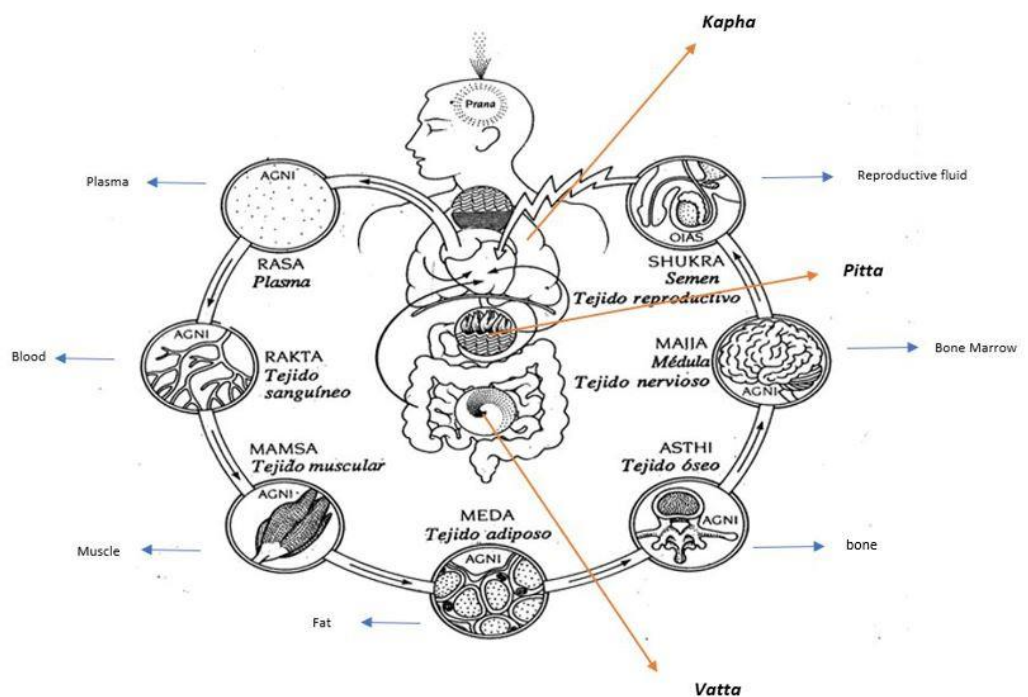


Figure 18 Adaptation of the seven Dhatus (Source: Lad, 2020).

Vivekananda (1989) argues that the balance from a societal perspective was re-designed by Christianity, whose believers hung onto the idea of emancipation through equality for all. This interpretation of freedom through the lens of equality constrains the ancient teachings of empowerment. The natural equilibrium of chaos and order that cultivates creativity becomes lost to an impossible battle that sacrifices empowerment for uniformity. It could therefore be argued that the right

to equality is misleading, disrupting the balance between human struggle and flourishing. The permeability of the mind is what fuels the continuous thinking, causing disturbance and imbalance. Quietening the mind sits at the core of ancient Indian wisdom (Ven, no date; Vivekananda, no date). To conclude, the current velocity of our thinking and constant mental activity is like the mental disruption of thought and language described in the biblical story of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9).

5.9 Part 2: Pedagogy

The pedagogy of ancient wisdom asserts that knowledge is power (Vivekananda, 1989). The deviation between ancient pedagogy and contemporary approaches lies in the restrictive nature that binds learning to the senses (Vivekananda, no date). For example, the Buddha was able to identify his disciple's interests and carve a pedagogy that would revolve around these interests, stimulating critical thinking and the pursuit to discover truth through experience (Mahathera, 1998). The Buddha created a methodological pathway which his disciples became empowered through education. Figure 19 is an adaptation of the core pedagogical methods used to guide his disciples into a state of empowerment. Throughout the learning cycle, the methods adopted correspond to the individual's maturity and ability to conceptualise and think critically. Learning takes a cyclical form, which supports the notion of lifelong learning (Cummins and Kunkel, 2015). One of the threads throughout the Buddhist teaching method is the permanence of introspection, self-awareness and liberation from suffering (Mahathera, 1998). From a Buddhist perspective, equanimity – suppleness, is the ability to withstand conflict and challenges and maintain balance. Implementing mental wellbeing as a pedagogy builds endurance against suffering. This battle to end suffering from an external perspective has no end. Vivekananda (1989) argues that we can neither add happiness nor suffering to the world as the sum total of the energies are in complete states; taking us back to the Yin-Yang concept of chaos and order.

Figure 19 further references the teaching of the three states of existence; *dukkha, annicca, annotta* – before one has mastered suffering – craving,

impermanence, and non-attachment (Mahathera, 1998; Vivekananda, 1989). In a similar manner the African indigenous peoples mostly transmitted knowledge orally from one generation to another, learning about *Ubuntu* through self-discovery and direct experience within local communities (Khomba, 2011). In modern learning, education is being transmitted through a reductive approach, focusing on intellectual accumulation leaving behind the purpose of being (Illich, 1978).

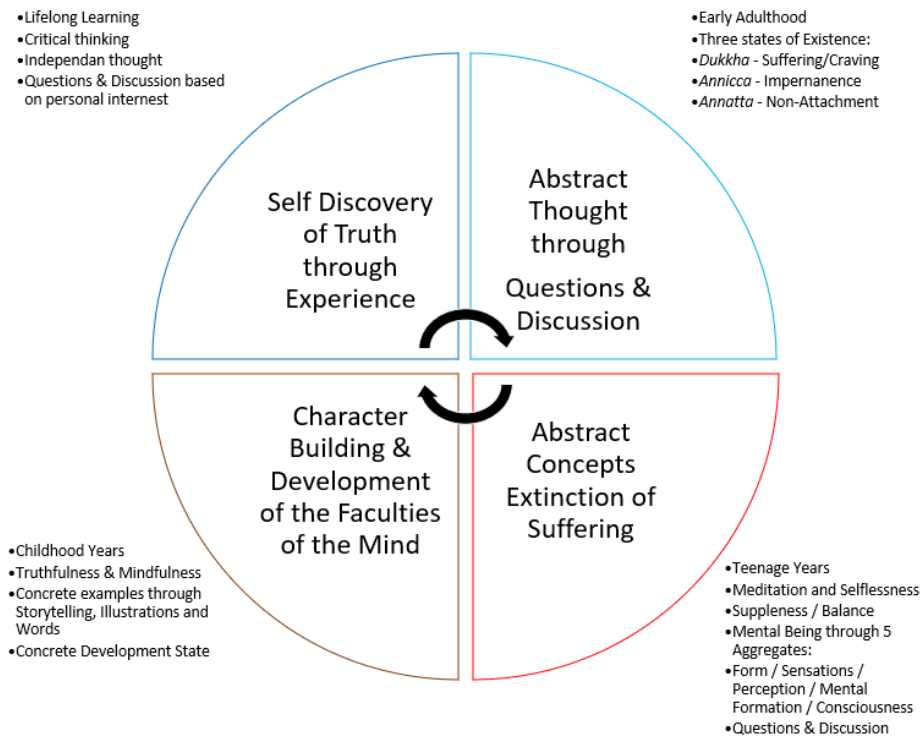


Figure 19 An adaptation of Buddhist methodological pathway of pedagogical approaches that empower (Mahathera, 1998).

The pedagogical approach of ancient wisdom is two-fold; to action and to absorb. Therefore, ancient learning is motion – a living and breathing exercise of being (M, 2012). Education has become the pursuit of knowledge whilst leaving behind the motion of learning. The coping mechanisms from ancient wisdom such as introspection, self-governance, suppleness, meditation, and mindfulness are not being incorporated into mainstream education, signalling a missed opportunity to harness these wisdoms (Ryser, 2012). The ancient approach to pedagogy centres on knowing how to be human, which is an entirely internal process captured in an ancient Mayan tale of ‘One Batz and One Chouen’ who were sages turned into

monkeys by their half-brother. The brothers had tremendous talent and could play the flute, sing, and write, but despite all this, their hearts were full of envy. This ancient tale describes a state of ignorance – the brothers had lost their purpose and with that had forgotten Heart of Sky — resembling the wooden people’s descendants (Christenson, 2003, p.126). Similarly, the moral of the story describes talent as an empty pursuit without a greater (Gade, 2012).

The Hindu philosophical text *Bhagavad Gita* emphasises the unity of life with spirit. Enlightenment cannot be reached with intellect or philosophy; these are complementary tools (Radharkrishnan, 1963, p.75). The accumulation of knowledge, as discussed above, is without motion as it lacks action. It is not transformative on its own, needing to be accompanied by wisdom. Wisdom, therefore, becomes and is manifested in the person. “Wisdom is personified as a being whose body is knowledge and whose heart is love” (Radharkrishnan, 1963, p.75). In this, the findings show that wisdom was also an operational aspect of political, social, cultural, and economic structures of ancient societies. For example, indigenous cultures have a reverence for their elders (Christenson, 2003). Research shows a correlation between wellbeing and old age through emotional stability, self-directedness and self-transcendence (Jeste and Lee, 2019). Self-realisation from a Buddhist lens is the ability to free yourself. The Buddha himself reached a state of self-reliance (salvation), which can be interpreted as the optimum form of empowerment (Mahathera, 1998; Radhakrishnana, 1950). This is comparable to the ability to reach independent thought, achieved through self-seeking truth (Gandhi, 2001; Radharkrishnan, 1963). Contemporary education follows a very different formation. It is a pedagogy that preaches dependency on teachers, structure and accreditation (Illich, 1970). From a Buddhist perspective to depend on others for *salvation* or freedom is bondage (Mahathera, 1998).

Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another’s seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, ‘The monk is our teacher.’ Kalamas, when you yourselves know: ‘These

things are good; these things are not blameable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed (Thera, 1981).

The quote from the Kalamas Sutra above reaffirms the process of empowerment through education, which is one of self-discovery and critical thinking. Furthermore, Vivekananda (1989) argues that our state of consciousness determines the unveiling of knowledge that comes to humans. From this perspective, knowledge is inherently internal, and it is through self-knowledge that one embarks on a journey of discovery.

5.10 Part 3: Empowerment

Freedom and liberation are a continuous theme throughout the ancient texts reviewed, contrary to the notions of divinity and spirituality. To free oneself from the sufferings of *Samsara* begins with a determination (Khantipālo, 1997). The battles depicted in the *Bhagavad Gita* are internal conflicts. These battles are necessary and part of the learning process. The ancient texts do not condemn the ego (lower) self: it is essential and a helper to master internal control.

Furthermore, conquering the (lower) self by the (higher) self is done in love for the sake of liberation (Radharkrishnan, 1963). From a pedagogical perspective, the Buddhist teaching methodology shapes the relationship between education and empowerment. Encouraging critical thinking through question and discussion veers towards a flexible learning approach (Radhakrishnana, 1950). Empowerment is found in the absence of rigidity. This is supported by the previous findings regarding health and wellbeing that discuss the motion of balance between life's cyclicity.

In the state of empowerment, knowledge becomes useful and works for the motion of freedom (Rao, no date). Similarly, the *Ubuntu* philosophy supports the notion of oneness (Khomba, 2011) – freedom is not the destruction of the senses (lower-self) but rather the unity and oneness of the senses in accord with your being (Rao, no date). Here is one of the oldest lessons from all the ancient texts that warn of the impermanence of life's enjoyments (Vivekananda, no date). Control,

which is depicted as bondage, enslaves the mind, confusing one's true nature with experience.

When one is confused about who they are, they cannot distinguish themselves from anger or any other emotion (Vivekananda, 1989) — drawing the discussion back into technologies such as yoga, meditation, and mindfulness, which are all introspective methods (Iyengar and Taty, 2003). Vivekananda (1989) argues that those who master the *chitta* – (cessation of all mental activity) and retain only the unmanifested impressions, are not to be confused with the ignorant (untrained) who make their minds vacant, only filling it with *tamas* – inactivity and dullness. Empowerment begins to take on new characteristics; it is an internal motion of transformation. According to *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*, the relationship between empowerment and education follows a seven-stage process that begins with self-knowledge, prompting a cessation of suffering. The yogic understanding of empowerment from this transient base level is remaining in a state of 'good tendency,' and from an ancient perspective, being dependent on an external state is not liberation. In presenting empowerment as an external process, caveats are put in place to people's empowerment that lie beyond their control. This chapter argues that in this modern interpretation of empowerment there is an absence of absolute freedom; as Vivekananda (1989) argues, bondage can also be found in gold chains.

The essence of the 60 songs of Milarepa is the teachings to liberation; "He who has no attachment whatsoever towards the mind and body, and who does not grieve for what he has not, – he indeed, is called a *bhikku*" (Khantipālo, 1997, p.12). Non-attachment is the embodiment of self-governance (Radhakrishnana, 1950). The ancient wisdom of the *Gita* calls the state of stable intelligence when the mind has been controlled, and desire is no more (Radharkrishnan, 1963; Rao, no date). The philosophy of *Ubuntu* is also intertwined with the virtue of non-attachment. Being human through others requires a total sense or rendition of the ego (Khomba, 2011). The Buddhist teaching of non-attachment discusses renunciation as an act of full awareness. A renunciation is a ritualistic act, and one cannot renounce wealth when one is poor. That is why the story of the Buddha as a prince

embodies non-attachment (Mahathera, 1998). One may also draw parallels to the story of Jesus, who left the heavens to become man and die for humanity's sins (John, 6:38).

Happiness experienced through the senses is also part of the enslaved landscape (Vivekananda, 1989; Radhakrishnana, 1950). The ancient texts refer to true happiness as a permanent state beyond the senses, referred to as *nirvana* or *samadhi*, in Hinduism, and Buddhism: it is a state of perfection (Nauriyal, Drummond, and Lal, 2006; Radharkrishnan, 1963; The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali's, no date).

Happiness is the universal aim of life. Only it is of different kinds according to the mode which dominate our nature. If the *tamas* predominates in us, we are satisfied with violence and inertia, blindness, and error. If *rajas* prevails, wealth and power, pride, and glory give us happiness. True happiness of human beings lies not in the possession of outward things but in the fulfilment of the higher mind and spirit, in the development of what is most inward in us. It may mean pain and restraint... (Radharkrishnan, 1963, p.363)

Throughout the narrative literature review, the disempowerment theme runs parallel to empowerment. Categorised in acts that enslave and actions that liberate. "The people of the world, with burning desires, and craving, distracted by affairs, become the slaves of the Earth" (Khantipālo, 1997, p.17). The ancient Mayan teachings embrace the same principle of material wealth and discuss the glory of man transcending 'gold and silver' as symbols of prestige (Christenson, 2003, p.85). The ancient Mayan tales of 'One Batz and One Chouen' draw similar notions of a dehumanised state as these brothers were turned into animals, symbolising the loss of humanity due to the dictates of the heart (Christenson, 2003). Again, this same wisdom runs through different ancient philosophies like *Ubuntu* that does and not grant humanity for being human, but one becomes human through a shared humanity (Khomba, 2011).

Daoist teaching conveys the relationship between desire and outward vision and insight with the unclouding of craving (Tzu, 1995). From a Buddhist perspective, when there is no internal happiness, work becomes self-punishment, and it

becomes yet another chain that subjugates the person who looks for external gratification in the absence of bliss (Khantipālo, 1997). The balanced relationship between work and happiness lies in work that is not centred on reward (Radharkrishnan, 1963). The external lens that dictates how 'good work' and progress is valued is dependent on external attachment, material wealth, and status. From a health perspective, this would suggest that there is an imbalanced relationship between work and wellbeing. Good work ought to come from an internal want and satisfaction regardless of external praise (Vivekananda, 1989).

The theme of individualism takes the findings and discussion of the narrative literature review back into full circle with the natural cyclicity of life and oneness. In this, individualism is the rupture of organic belonging. The idea of the self-made person from an ancient lens is selfishness, and contrary to the principles of oneness that are observed in nature's natural cycles. Individualism is a separate to being alone in a meditative state. Individualism from an *Ubuntu* perspective is rendering one's humanness (Gade, 2012). This chapter presents these philosophical principles that together weave a narrative of the meaning of human existence, and in this is death; the enjoyment of death is tampered with because one's nature has intermingled with external attachment. From an ancient lens, death is just as much a part of life, the ancient texts accept death as necessary and with joy, this seizes to be the case when attachment makes its way into our lives, and we cling to what is ours with possessiveness unwilling to let go. The creation of humans from an ancient Mayan lens talks of the making of human flesh from Earth and mud, thus inferring the cyclical nature of life as we render our flesh back to the Earth (Christenson, 2003). When critically analysing ancient wisdom and modern-day knowledge, it compares with the story of creation by the ancient Mayan god's *Framer* and *Shaper*. In their trials and errors whilst attempting for the perfect being, who would worship them and multiply and be filled with knowledge, they made some that would crumble, lacked understanding, and could not speak before their creators. Similarly, the inability to understand one's purpose and place draws parallels to these beings who were unable to flourish (Christenson, 2003, p.72-74), And, although these are ancient tales they are still relevant, the Western ideal of

every person for himself and the self-made person lack love and compassion (Ngomane, 2019; Msengana, 2006; Vivekananda, 1989). The abyss that individualism leads to is described in Daoism as an unfillable void (Tzu, 1995).

The Buddhist definition of ignorance is the lack of intuitive insight and morality; being ignorant is a result of choices that remove us from our true nature (Radhakrishnana, 1950). Contrary to the modern perspective, ignorance has nothing to do with a lack of worldly knowledge. In this sense, equality is not subject to education as we are equal through a shared humanity irrespective of external influences and circumstances (Vivekananda, 1989). Humility steps forward as a signal of wisdom that from a Western lens may be deemed as lacking in self-confidence. When examining the ancient wisdom that promotes health and wellbeing, there is no segment specifically focused on health and wellbeing. Rather, it is all about health and wellbeing in some way or other. From a mental health aspect, spirituality and rituals bring connectedness, unity, love and compassion (Khomba, 2011). Real health is the manifestation of what is happening on the inside regarding balance and harmony (Sivan, 2013; Loon, 2003; Veith, 1949).

The second aiding research question on connecting concepts to pedagogy, health and empowerment are balance, empowerment, and pedagogy. The findings have been characterised as such to represent the connecting thread throughout ancient wisdom. Being in balance is essential to the ancient definition of health. This theme runs through the practical aspect of *Haya Yoga Pradipika of Svatomarama* to *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* and the *Ayurveda*; resulting in suppleness of mind and body (Iyengar and Taty, 2003). As discussed, empowerment and education run hand in hand.

The third research question is on ancient technologies that facilitate empowerment; yoga, meditation, mindfulness, and contemplation, which are facilitators of empowerment. These are technologies that activate the physiological and psychological mechanics of the human. Furthermore, we are all equipped with the necessary devices to access these technologies. It is through self-governance, which is, in essence empowerment, and changing habits from a place of awareness, that we can begin to activate and balance the three *doshas* (Sivan, 2013).

The final research question on what empowerment is from an ancient philosophical and spiritual perspective is liberation from bondage. Slavery is a pivotal theme throughout the ancient texts examined in this narrative literature review. Any control from an external source is disempowerment. The complete understanding of your true nature is what sets you free and brings forth unity with a higher consciousness (Sayadaw, 1991). Through this understanding comes self-governance: nothing controls you any longer, but you are master of yourself.

5.11 Conclusion

There is an underlying principle of individualism that cuts through how we understand education and segregate learning into categories of formal, non-formal, and informal (Illich, 1970). Similarly, health knowledge has been pulled away from the community and institutionalised, restricting local access to medicinal rituals and traditions (Ferreira and Lang, 2005). The distinction between ancient and modern draws out two main conclusions regarding humanity, and the unravelling of actions that emanate from beings who are connected and beings who are disconnected (Veith, 1949). The root that connects Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, and ancient Mayan philosophy is the facilitation of empowerment. The overarching research question of the narrative literature review is whether ancient pedagogical approaches facilitate empowerment. Unlike the scoping reviews' research answer that followed the examination of contemporary pedagogical approaches and empowerment and concluded in yes and no, there is a conclusive answer of yes regarding ancient pedagogy and empowerment. The findings have shown that all ancient pedagogical approaches lead to a path of freedom and liberation and are necessary and relevant for modern society (Vivekananda, 1989).

The philosophical teaching differs from intellectual suppositions because they involve motion, requiring a change of habits. Ancient pedagogical approaches can therefore be described as a facilitator to empowerment. They stimulate introspection and self-knowledge; love and compassion surge when one identifies with its true nature, bringing harmony, suppleness and balance (Khantipālo, 1997). There is an envelope of gratitude at being alive. The teachings of *dharma* are

metaphorically referred to as living teachings within, prompting meaning and gratitude to the human body as a rare gift (Khantipālo, 1997, p.21). The pedagogy of introspection empowers its learners as external dependency becomes obsolete. The pedagogy of introspection is also charged with discomfort, bringing a time of darkness before realisation and aloneness. These are characteristics of movement and transformation (Radharkrishnan, 1963). The difference is that ancient wisdom prepares the learner in the suppleness of the mind, body, and spirit. Contemporary inequality has increased because of disproportionate access to resources, material wealth, education, and accreditation.

From all perspectives, ancient wisdom makes an essential bedrock to reach the optimum levels of wellbeing, happiness, and serenity. The anxiety that comes from life, its challenges, and sufferings are necessary, and make part of the landscape. The Daoist wisdom discusses this as yin and yang and finding the perfect balance between both is where elevated consciousness surfaces (Tzu, 1995). It is therefore futile to focus on ending external suffering as there will always be an imbalance. Instead, the focus should be on ending internal suffering born from reaction and craving. The dehumanisation from both the oppressor and the oppressed needs to be identified in pedagogy (Freire, 1972). Furthermore, the findings from this narrative literature review show that one person cannot empower another; this applies to institutions, religions, or dogma. Colonialism expressed by the expansion of capitalism is founded on the idea of saviourism, deeply rooted in the interpretation of Christianity. Vivekananda (1989) argues that giving charity to someone else does not exist, as to help others only benefits the helper. There is no superiority; there is only the opportunity for individual empowerment.

From an ancient perspective on modern-day life, we know very little, and with this comes a great sense of humility. The Global South has an immeasurable abundance of wisdom that can be fused with modern advancements and technological development. Western society's problems and the Western ideals of life, which stem from individualism, and external attachment, can be brought back to correction through ancient wisdom and traditional knowledge. The birthplace of

these ancient epistemologies originates from the healing practices and rituals of communities that are perpetually overlooked and undervalued by the colonial and Western standards of progress (Ryser, 2012).

6 Findings and Analysis: Autoethnographic Reflections of the Journey Seeking Empowerment

Perro viejo ladra echado – old dogs bark lying down.

(Colombian Parable)

6.1 Introduction

The significance of this old Colombian parable is the wisdom that comes from age; young dogs bark incessantly at any sign of commotion, older dogs through experience learn to recognise danger and act wisely. Similarly, as the reader disentangles the many narratives of this autoethnographic account the wisdom acquired through age from my grandmother and mother are reflected in their ability to manage their external world. My journey to empowerment is a continuous reflective experience interwoven with everyday life. As I explore the knowledge of the self, the memories of the past become revived, ceasing to become static images. The process of reflection merges time into one, working the past works into the now, which paves the way to becoming (Peterson, 2018). The *chitta* – the memory that is selective in what it remembers and forgets – influences the mind and the intellect (Pai, 2019, p.285). Vivekandanda (1989) describes the mind through the simile of a lake. The *chitta* being the lake, experiences ripples and disturbances to its waters, which obscure the ability to see to the bottom, where lies our True Self.

As I reflect on where we are now as individuals and as a collective, my sense of self becomes the amalgamation of the women born before me. The vulnerabilities and challenges that have left impressions on my grandmother and on my mother are a part of understanding 'Who am I, really?' Oneness and the interconnectedness with others is the thread of *Ubuntu* that weaves through a greater understanding of humanity and its need for others to become human (Ngomane, 2019; Khomba, 2011).

There is a great deal of spirituality that is interwoven in the life stories of my *abuela* (grandmother) and my mother. Throughout my *abuela*'s life, there was a burning conviction that she would leave Colombia. She wanted to enlist in the girls' basketball team because there was an opportunity to travel and compete in tournaments. She would sit and daydream, imagining faraway countries, thinking of their strangeness, how exciting it must be to see something new. As the years rolled on from one to the other, her conviction that she would leave Colombia never died. She had placed hope on her third son, hoping he would be the one to 'liberate' the family from the continued abuse they were all subjected to. The ability to envision an alternative future was sparked at an early age by her informal learning. As she matured, this vision was turned to faith. From a spiritual context, it draws parallels with the biblical story of Abraham and the promise made to him by God that he would one day have a son of his own. It was only when he turned 100 years old that his wife Sarah gave birth to Isaac (Genesis 17:1–23–27). One can only imagine the despair as he watched the years roll by and questioned whether that dream would ever materialise. The story of Abraham is about helplessness, faith, and patience. Strength and courage grounds older generations, and wisdom guides them.

My mother, on the other hand, experienced a childhood of suffering and violence: it was these struggles that made her into the Moses she needed to become for her family to leave Colombia and their suffering behind. Being the eldest of 11 children propelled her into action. From an empowerment perspective, both these life experiences represent women in vulnerable settings, marginalised, and from an uneven development context. This did not render them inactive, helpless, or incapable: they were already empowered, and they managed to make transformative changes to their lives through ties of unity and humaneness (Butler, 2020). As she made the lonely journey to the United Kingdom as an immigrant in the 1980s, the only thing that she clung to was the promise she had made to me, her brothers, and sisters and mother.

This reflection of seeking empowerment is the story of three women and the lessons passed on from daughter to daughter.

6.2 Autoethnographic Reflections

6.2.1 The Lush Green Landscapes of Colombia

It all started in the lush green landscapes of rural Colombia. My grandmother's infancy was an idyllic setting. She was born on September 22nd in 1939, when the rise of the Liberals was at an all-time high from 1930 to 1946. As the rest of the world braced themselves before the Second World War, Colombia was but a large country house to her. She was unaware of the rising division in the country. She grew up in 'El Valle' – Colombia. Her eyes glaze with warmth when she recounts her childhood memories. Her upbringing was wholesome. There were no restraints placed on her as a child. She was free to roam, explore, to pick fruit with her brothers and sisters until their heart's content. From a pedagogical perspective, her infancy allowed her to understand the workings of the family as she grew up in an environment immersed in active learning, an experience that is largely obscured in modern society with the division of labour or explosion of entertainment in modern child-rearing techniques. She grew up watching her father and mother work and barter. She understood the land and its animals. There was a continuous educational process in learning to cooperate as a much needed member of the family (Pinsker, 2021).

From an African context, Rodney (1972), argues that the richness of informal education lies in the example and behaviour of its elders. The relevance to informal education within the familial and community setting is its usefulness to preparedness for adulthood; the environment itself becomes a child's teacher (Illich, 1978).

From a modern lens, wholesomeness and innocence are associated as general characteristics to a child and seen as a transient stage. The *Chandogya Upanishad* – The Upanishad of the Sacred Metre, tells the story of *Shvetaketu*, a young man in search of finding out the mysteries of the mind and the universe. His father asks him to break a fig fruit; in doing so, his father asks, "What can you see?" the son answers that he sees tiny seeds. His father asks him to cut one of the tiny seeds in half and then asks again, "What do you see?" to which the child responds

“Nothing.” Ancient wisdom refers to this nothingness as the completion of everything. It is precisely that nothingness that is the *atman* – True Self (Pai, 2019, p.362). The fewer impressions made on a child’s mind, the greater the child’s ability to simply ‘be’ (Pinsker, 2021). The concepts of wholesomeness that is associated with innocence is better understood as the person’s true nature.

Abuela’s parents had a lush farm, always buzzing with workers. She recounts her father as a virtuous man, never cursing, or losing his temper. She grew up guzzling warm milk straight from the cow’s tit. She and her brothers would eat so many avocados in one sitting that she once fell off a tree because she was dizzy from gorging on the fruit. She recounts her years as endless seasons of freedom, hanging off trees, feeding the chickens, collecting eggs, and picking fresh fruit. She would roll around with her brothers and sisters, scraping knees, riding on horses, and helping around the farm. Despite her experiences later, there remains a wholeness to her, intact, unscratched. My grandmother was the eldest in her family and the closest to her grandmother. She was doted on by her, so much so that she gave her, her most treasured gift, a horse for one of her birthdays. Abuela remembers how she would ride into town as they delivered their coffee beans to sell and trade, like so many other families in Colombia who lived off the coffee industry. During the early years of the Regeneration, the coffee export expanded rapidly, representing 55% of the total value of Colombian exports by 1896 (Delpar, 1976). My grandmother sits contemplatively: her mannerisms tell the story of a woman who evidently was treated gentler by life in her early years, and although there is a firmness to her character, there is still an air of privilege. She reminds me of those old trees that sit gently with their roots firmly planted deep in the soil, who evoke wisdom. There is a conviction about her. She is someone who is not moved or phased by the flutter of life. Her silent rebellious nature brews quietly and majestically, like the deep ocean that quietly rumbles before a storm, and perhaps the depth that comes with her is a coping mechanism she developed to withstand the abuse she endured.

Abuela learned to read, write, and do basic mathematics by peering through her brothers’ primary school window. Her father had dismissed the idea of her

going to school. The belief about girls' education at that time was that they did not need schooling. Schooling was for the men who had to seek employment outside in a market economy. It was a waste of time, in his view. Sixty percent of the population in Colombia were illiterate: education was an excessive privilege (Henderson, 1985). Abuela did her best to present her case to her dad. She pleaded with him to send her to school. Turning to his daughter he replied with bewilderment, unable to understand why school would be attractive to her: "*Para que hija?*" (*For what dear?*), he said. He was always calm, always gentle, never angry, unable to imagine that his daughter's life would be met with deprivation or require her to seek the help of anyone besides a devoted husband, who would provide and care for her and her children as he had always done. Even at such a tender age, she gathered any money she could from doing jobs around the farm and would run to the only shop in town that sold school supplies. She invested her hard-earned coins in notebooks, pencils, and grammar books to practice her handwriting. Now that her brothers had started school every day, once class had settled, and children had taken their seats, she would stand outside the window and copy what she saw on the blackboard. Education reform in Colombia in the 1940s saw one-third of school-age children attend primary school, a similar figure to that of the 1920s, with numbers dwindling even more as only 6% of students entered secondary school (Helg, 1993). Education in the 1940s embodied the disparity and inequality which was being felt throughout Colombia.

The political landscape in Colombia saw the taut relationship between the liberals and the conservatives that gave rise to five major revolutions during the first six decades of independence (Delpar, 1976) and yet this little girl did not quite understand the world around her. As Abuela grew older, she began to stay behind at her mother's request to help her with some private sewing lessons. Abuela would sit there quietly and watch as her mother's teacher gave her lessons, leaving her to practice on. As soon as her teacher left the house, she would turn to her daughter, exacerbated, and confused, as she had not been able to fully grasp the instructions of that day's lesson. Abuela was quick at learning by just observing, similar to how she learned to read and right from outside her brother's primary

classroom window. For most of her learning experiences she was uninvited and although she was asked to observe, the teaching was not geared towards her. Her learning was tinged with exclusion. As soon as the lessons came to an end and the teacher would warmly say her goodbyes closing the heavy wooden doors, her mother would swoop over, making room for Abuela to take her place behind the sewing machine. The hum of the sewing machine silenced all outside noise, as she skilfully learnt to make all sorts of dresses with frills, pants for work, shirts, and blouses with different prints and colours. She learnt dressmaking almost immediately. Without hesitation, everything she saw being done was quickly replicated. With dexterity, she began making clothes and taking on jobs from the locals. Dresses, suits, school uniforms, shirts, wedding dresses all became her art.



Figure 20 Left: My grandmother to the left as a child with her mother. Right: My great grandmother (Bertilda) in the centre and her extended family in Rural Colombia.

The lush green that had once been a haven began to disintegrate; neighbours were no longer like family and all strangers were enemies. Abuela remembers militia groups turning up at all hours of the day making their way through their fields asking whether they supported the liberals or the conservatives. People were being killed throughout rural Colombia. It became tense, unbearable; they knew that they would be killed because of their land or called out as traitors. Just before dawn broke in the early hours one morning, ahead of the world waking up, when everything was still and dark, they packed what they could, mounted the horse and cart, and set off to the next town in Rio Frio – Tulua Cauca. They continued their second leg of the journey by car to Medellin, Antioquia. A few weeks after they arrived in Medellin in 1948, the much loved popular reformist leader, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, was assassinated on April 9th; otherwise he would probably have risen to become president (Henderson, 1985). The assassination of Gaitán ricocheted across the country. Abuela remembers the disillusion that swept over her father and uncles. Amid so much turbulence, there had been a shimmer of hope from his progressive reforms. His death was the flame that engulfed Colombia in a raging civil war lasting 10 years, known as the period of *La Violencia*; Santander led all other departments with 86.5 homicides per 100,000 population (Henderson, 1985, p.129).

The years rolled by and Abuela continued to sew, taking on more work as she entered her late teens. She met *Abuelo* – grandfather, when she was 17 years old. She tells the story of how they courted, exchanging glances, and flirting as they sent notes to one another. Abuelo also grew up in rural Colombia but had an entirely different upbringing to hers, experiencing a much more brutal childhood. His father was a tough man. I remember as a young girl, my great grandfather – Mateo, had a soft jaw from old age, his lips were wrinkled and turned inwards because he was toothless. He had tight grey curls hidden underneath a hat. He would scold me as a child because I played like a boy, shirtless, running and shouting through the neighbourhood streets, in and out of neighbours' houses in sheer excitement as all the kids from el barrio – the neighbourhood – would run and hide. Abuelo from the age of five, knew how to gather cattle. As the darkness

would creep in on the farmland in rural Colombia, Abuelo had to creep, heart racing, as he imagined ghosts chasing him through the dark farmland immersed in strange sounds. Abuelo spoke little about his childhood: we all knew it had been difficult. He left home at 14 and managed to finish the first few years of secondary school and join the army. Moving in and out of home, his family eventually relocated to Medellin. It was evident that his family did not share the same warmth and kindness that was present in Abuela's family.

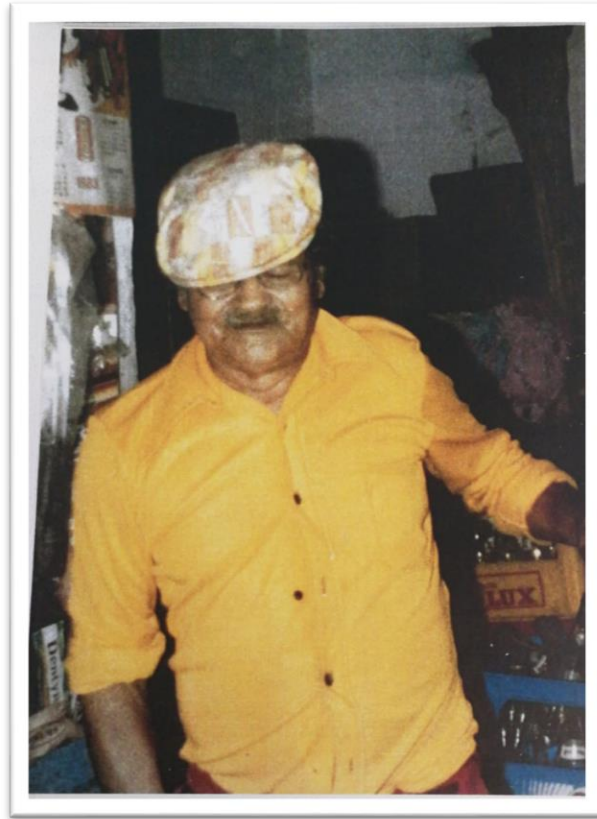


Figure 21 Left: My maternal great grandfather (the father of my grandfather, Mateo Rojas Zapata). Right: The researcher as a three-year-old child in Colombia.

Still, to this day, Abuela cannot forget the image of her father kneeling by her feet and imploring her not to marry Abuelo. Despite her father's disapproval she went ahead with the engagement in her childlike world, wanting to spite a few girls in the neighbourhood. She stood defiant and disregarded his advice. It was perhaps her first grown-up decision. She no longer felt like a child who had to obey.

Her relationship with her father speaks volumes of a father who showed love in a humble way. He tried to get my grandmother to see that perhaps Abuelo was not the man for her. That same arrogance that my grandmother showed that day prevented her from seeking help and leaving Abuelo, who turned out to be her abuser for the next 30 years. The abuse started after their honeymoon night was over. She recalls how she froze, holding her cheek as it throbbed from a slap, her eyes welling up. Despite the beatings becoming more severe, there was an unspoken rule, and her parents, looking at her with compassion, would never intervene in what was now a sacred union. On the day of Abuela's father's funeral, Abuelo gave her a curious-looking ring that she still wears today. It is a thick encrusted gold ring with a ruby, which speaks its age, with a Spanish antiquity flare to it. The ring gently rests on her finger: she rarely takes it off.

Her early years of marriage were met with hardship. A year and a half later, she had her firstborn, a daughter. This little girl was born with curly golden locks and hazel eyes, nicknamed *La conejita* – bunny – because she struggled to keep her slit eyes open for more than a few seconds, sleeping endlessly. When my mother hears this story about herself as a baby, she shakes her head with sadness. She finds it difficult to hear stories about her childhood because of the abuse and neglect she endured. She sits upright as though waking up from a bad dream. She finds it hard to believe her troubled childhood is over. She remarks that her eyes were shut because she wanted to block out her surroundings. Our family gatherings are mixed and usually end up with everyone talking about the past. Some of the most horrifying stories are usually met with bursts of laughter. That is something that has always astonished me, in a good way. Although there have been years of healing through deep conversations, prayer, and through church, making peace with the past and forgiving each other, their plight is usually dealt with humour.

From an outsider's perspective the stories' funny side would not make sense, but from an insider's perspective they do.



Figure 22 Left: My grandmother's father Jose Zuluaga. Right: My grandmother shortly after marrying.



Figure 23 My grandmother to the left when she was 15.

Abuela was thrust into an adult life and had little understanding of what womanhood meant. As a married woman without access to contraception and with little say about her sexual relationship, she became pregnant every 14 months and had 11 children and one miscarriage all by the age of 40. The contraceptive pill was out of the question, laced with religious piety from their strict Catholic upbringing and with Abuelo's jealousy and *machismo*, family planning was not something that a wife could engage with. An analysis conducted by the Colombian Association of Medical Faculties into the attitudes of Colombian women in 1969 and the contraceptive pill showed that women from a higher socio economic status and levels of schooling mainly within urban areas were more likely to use fertility control methods than women with less schooling (Baldwin and Pitt Ford, 1976). As a woman, Abuela sat in this difficult dichotomy where urbanisation and the unrest left by colonialism still lingered.

The relationship between alcoholism and domestic violence are complex problems. As argued by Korn (2014), these complex societal issues can be traced to the destabilisation brought by colonialism throughout the Americas and the development of alcoholism among native people. The plague of male alcoholism and its effects on women were not endemic to just the Americas. Women such as Hima Devi, who at 50 years old mobilised public opinion in rural India in 1965 against alcoholism, did not separate the issues of alcoholism and domestic violence with the destruction to nature by 'maldevelopment' and its connection to colonialism in guise of development projects (Shiva, 1999). The arguments posed by Leslie Korn regarding post-traumatic stress and the disruption to self-sufficient indigenous communities in the name of civilisation also merges the relationship between loss of traditional knowledge and health impacts through the increased consumption of refined food arising from development pressures. Eroded principles and rituals that formed cohesion of non-attachment are part of the constellation of issues that erode self-sufficiency amongst the communities' men and women in the West Coast of Mexico (Korn, 2014).

The early mornings, when Abuela was a young wife, were always welcomed by the women in the barrio as the men set off to work. The women would become

alive like birds ruffling their feathers and chirping to one another. The *barrio* became alive as the women connected with each other, sharing stories and consoling one another. Everyone knew everyone's business; they would counsel each other, stepping in as therapists and health practitioners. They looked out for one another. The privacy of the person or the household is alien to the generally expressive, loud, and generous Latinos. Physical space is not sacrosanct in the same way as in Eurocentric cultures. This sets an important departure from the individualistic nature, which is an essential characteristic amongst Western cultures, and creates communal bonds that form the social bonds of Latin American, African, Middle Eastern and Asian communities (Nussbaum, 1997).

As her children sat playing and making up games with one another, Abuela would peddle away at her sewing machine, making her way through the stacks of dress, suits, and uniform orders. Its loud and monotonous hum soothed her as she immersed in tasks leaving behind the chaos that enshrouded her. My mum remembers her as a slim and elegant woman, wearing floral dresses just below the knee, which flowed lightly with her movements throughout the day, with black and voluminous bouncing hair just below her shoulders. My mother and grandmother developed a relationship as lifelong friends transcending beyond a mother and daughter relationship. As soon as my mother became old enough, she began helping with Abuela's heavy burden. My mum has scars running down her arms from burns, from having stood at an early age on stools stirring large pots of soup. She had carried out domestic chores from the age of five, looking after her siblings. Her childhood ended abruptly when she stopped playing and became a protector for her younger siblings. Between them, they formed a pact and looked after one another, never telling on each other. As Abuela gave birth to more children, my mother's resentment grew; she was unable to understand in her early teenage years how Abuela could just continue having more children. She would ask herself why her mother was unable to leave him and how she could allow them to be beaten as they were. My mother and her brothers and sisters all slept in one room, huddled up at night, making one another giggle. When Abuela thrust, the door open demanding silence, they froze, holding each other in love and unity.

During the days when he was at work, they would fight like cats and dogs, causing each other accidents by playing too rough, unsupervised, and unafraid. The mood of the household would change when the one assigned to the task of keeping a look out for Abuelo's arrival would signal to the others. Between bruises and bust lips, their tears would turn to roars of laughter as they entertained one another and consoled each other.

Eventually, Abuelo left his job as a goods auditor at a hotel and began to work for himself. This meant that he had more time at home. He would sit next to Abuela as she peddled away on her sewing machine. As customers came in, he would charge and collect the money. He was particularly good at being friendly and acting humble. She was like the hen that lay the golden eggs. I have sat with Mother through endless conversations as she recounts the stories of the past. She remembers a particularly bitter December leading up to Christmas. All the 11 children and Abuela had put money away throughout the year in a hidden drawer under lock and key. It would be the first Christmas that they were going to buy presents for one another, but little went on in that house without Abuelo finding out. As Christmas was approaching, they found their secret stash hammered open and the money was gone. Instead of receiving gifts they now had to face the arrival of a violent and drunk father who would storm in at any moment.

All the kids were enrolled in school. Abuelo was keen for them to get an education and on those rare occasions when he was friendly and remorseful, he would try and play with them. Unfortunately, they could not help but be fearful of him suddenly losing his temper and this showed when they approached him. They always referred to him with responses such as, "Yes Sir" and "No, Sir," perhaps partly because of his military training. My mother was constantly miserable, carrying the family's problems on her shoulders, and feeling the scorn of her distant relatives and the looks of pity given by their grandmother. The children always looked dirty, scabby, underfed, and wore black eyes or bust lips. They would salivate as they walked past the bakers, knowing very well who in the neighbourhood had happy homes and pretty things. She recounts the many times she would try to ensure that the food was well cooked and the house tidy, trying to

mask over the esthetical cracks that represented so much of the broken and violent home they lived in. She witnessed years of rage enduring regular swollen eyes and also witnessing her mother being kicked whilst heavily pregnant, and her five-day-old sister being thrown against a wall because she would not stop crying.

Graduating from secondary school was an opportunity for her to leave for Bogota and enrol in a university course. This meant freedom for the first time in her life.



Figure 24 Left: My mother Erlinda Zapata as a small child. Right: My mother Erlinda Zapata as an older child.

Abuelo had already started building his cockpit business during this period, using his household of 11 as free labour. He demonstrated a level of ingenuity and ability despite the difficult setting. With the help of a few local builders, with building work and expansion of a café, cockpit, and bar, the business became a family endeavour. As they laid the foundations of the buildings, placing bricks upon bricks, they began building a small empire that would define so much of their youth.

There remains usefulness amongst all of my aunts and uncles. They sporadically display the most useful skills, like building extensions, pottery, sewing, gardening, animal rearing, mechanics, and the list goes on. This raw ability to construct and create is the self-sufficiency that permeates those who experienced learning in a non-reductionist manner (Illich, 1978). They worked before school and after school, without complaining. My grandfather had inherited his entrepreneurial skills from his father. There was little that he was not able to achieve. He had a chameleon style personality, able to quickly read a situation and act. When it was suitable, he was the poor man with 11 children; when he was 'el Gallero,' he pulled out his revolver. Everyone who was influential and in a position of power in the district was aware of him. The word 'astute' depicts him through and through, with a crass sense of humour. He always managed to have the upper hand. He would carry two bundles of notes in his trouser pockets, one fake and the other real. If he was ever stopped by police officers and needed to bribe anyone, he would pull out the fake notes, drive off quickly and burst out laughing once they were no longer in sight. He lived in a permanent state of agitation and fighting for survival, as if he was perpetually in quicksand.

Medellin, at the time, oozed with corruption. During the late 1970s and 1980s, the energy was always electric as women walked quickly clutching their handbags, young men lingered about on street corners, flashy cars rode by slowly whistling at schoolgirls, whilst the elderly sat outside playing dice games. This was during the hype of Pablo Escobar (1949 – 1993), and Medellin was his playground: my family's neighbourhood was one of the most dangerous in the city, with daily drive-by shootings becoming a common scene. The recent fascination with one of

the world's most notorious drug lords fails to capture the local destruction that his drug empire had on families like mine. A study on violence in Colombia found that homicide in 1979 accounted for 4.82% of deaths in Colombia but rose steeply in the 1980s, ranking the most common cause by 1987, 11% of all deaths (Smith, 1989). If young men were not recruited to work as *sicarios* (paid hitmen), they were being gunned down. This also perpetuated the violence on young women brought about by the culture of *machismo*. Extortion, kidnappings, and murders became the bread and butter for ordinary households.

As my mum packed her bags for Bogota, all of her brothers and sisters lined up in a manner common to them. Abuela looked at her with heavy eyes welling up with tears. My mum was a strong figure in the family and had from a young age learnt to defend them. In many ways, she was also a mother to them, impatiently teaching them to read, clearing out their hair from lice, carrying, and feeding them.

6.2.2 Bogota

My mother had never visited another city, let alone lived alone, and making her way to the university, she felt that she could finally breathe. She loved to dance salsa and could easily drink more than her male friends, being nicknamed '*la leona*' – the lioness. It was not long before she was well known and well-liked by her colleagues. She and her friends belonged to the lower echelons of university life; they were the ones who had not made it to study for a university degree, making them ruckus and free. Grandmother would always send her money tightly packed in letters. Colombians speak using sayings most of the time that impart moral lessons – there is a particular one that is a favourite; '*Donde no hay cazuela ahí se fritá,*' meaning "Where there is no casserole, that is where you fry." The meaning of this popular phrase is that those who have the least, from where you expect the least help, or those who have nothing or less than you are the ones who give the most. This is significant because when my mother faced economic hardship, especially after I was born, it was my grandmother who managed to scrape together money to send to us. These unexpected givers and wells of endless bounty become your life support. That was what my grandmother, in her non-judgemental manner,

represented for my mother during her time away. She was always the one who provided her children with a meal, clothes, or money.

My mother was ambitious and picky and avoided dating from her neighbourhood because she aspired to more. There was a reluctance in her that prevented her from accepting a destiny she had not written for herself. My father was from the coast and had a flair about him. With an upper-class Spanish and petulant persona, he had pretended not to notice her. Coming from a well-to-do family, his family members were all privately educated with private healthcare.

For the first year of their relationship, my mother was loved by him, and as they lived tucked away in this world, away from any sense of reality, they became inseparable. She was this force he could not quite understand. My father gathered all his money from that year's semester, and they married. She wore a 1940s' pastel blue dress with a short face-net hairpiece. She walked down the aisle alone, with no mother to kiss her forehead or bless her. She told me years later that she felt in her heart that it would not last. Perhaps, feeling this sense of loss before a journey had even commenced, it could only unfold into a life of emptiness. I believe that he still cannot fully comprehend who my mother really was and everything she had endured. Behind fierceness lay a sensitive, loyal, and loving woman. She had envisioned a life of freedom despite the stricken poverty circumstances of her life.

They drank, danced, and laughed, as the music swirled, carrying them off on a new life away from the mutter of gossiping voices. His mother, frantic at the gossip that swirled around about her son marrying a girl from *el barrio*, had heard that this young woman was a drunk. Her son, this perfect gentleman, studying to become a doctor, could not possibly have fallen in love with someone like that. Oh, but so poor, surely this was witchcraft? Little did she know that they would, in time, create a bond so beautiful that it would last until she breathed her last breath.

Colombia's social stratification system rates districts from 1 to 6 for affluence. From a policy perspective, this system serves as an indicator for the subsidisation of services, but through an anthropological lens, people carry a stigma (Jessel, 2017). As both their worlds collided, they shared stories of their infancy. My mother would play down the tremendous poverty she experienced and the level of

violence that coloured every sunrise. My mother and her younger siblings had to share school uniforms, passing an already worn uniform on to the next one, as they entered the afternoon session. They would hurry home, wash the socks, and set them to dry for the others. They would pull on damp socks and worn-out shoes and attempted to blend in with the rest of the students. Sometimes it was inevitable for them to become the laughingstock of the class as lice would crawl and make their way down their foreheads. Fingers would point and screeching was familiar to them. They managed to shrug it off, joining in with the laughter to keep face and teasing one another on their way back home in that very Colombian manner. As my parents exchanged their stories, their miseries, the infidelity of both their fathers and the violence inflicted on their mothers, they consoled one another. Both were certain that their marriage would not be the same, that between them things would be different.

One of the greatest attributes to my mother is her sacrificial nature. Perhaps you could argue that from such an early age, she learnt to give up a lot for the sake of others. I am compelled to take a different view because you can unlearn behaviours and naturally unfold into your natural state of being. This loving nature of hers is her essence, like when lake waters settle, and one can peer through to the bottom. It is her unselfish form that remains despite the disturbances of the waters (Vivekananda, 1989).

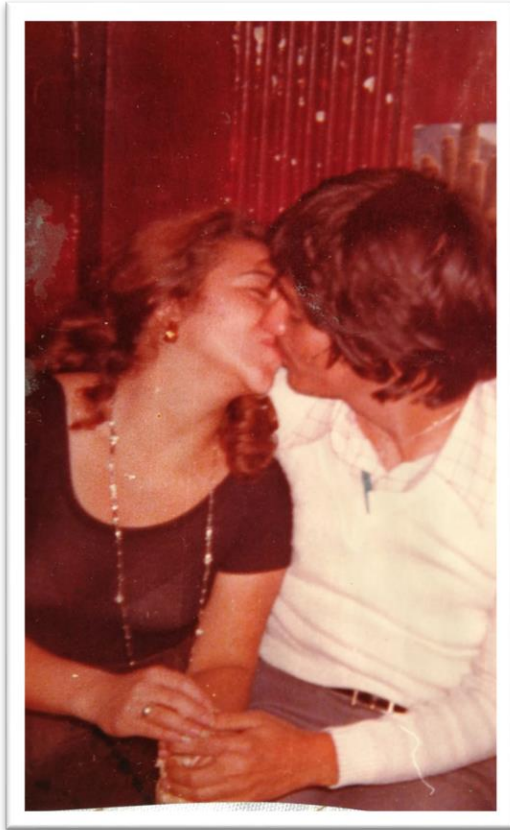


Figure 25 Left: My mother and father in Bogota. Right: My mother and father on their wedding day.

My mother cut her course short and did not complete her study programme just before her last exam. She embraced married life, and my father continued his studies and opted to become a science teacher after failing a medical examination. The news reached Abuelo that my mother had not finished her studies and had instead eloped. This was received by my grandfather as defiance and a direct power struggle between my mother and grandfather emerged. Her marriage was an act of rebellion. Life as a married woman took an unexpected turn for my mother. My father, eager for them to start a family, encouraged her to undergo a fertility treatment. The news of her pregnancy was met with delight and as they both made ends meet living humbly, love allowed them to be carried through their challenges in a state of contentment.

Studies from over 20 years on the correlation between wealth and happiness show consistently that once basic needs are met, for example, shelter, and food, the increase in income does not have a lasting impact on subjective wellbeing (happiness). Rather, income produces short-term pleasure. Subjective wellbeing is measured through self-reporting of life satisfaction, the emotional state of people, and their understanding of the meaning of life and how it is correlated with a higher level of income (Ahuvia, 2008, p.6). Furthermore, a multi-level analysis by Schyns (2000) showed that economic status accounted for only around 5% of subjective wellbeing, leaving 95% of the variance independent of wealth. The financial situation my parents experienced in the first years of their relationship was potentially the most deprived of wealth. My father continued to take on extra work by teaching in the evenings in pursuit of a more comfortable life. This was the beginning of their drift apart. Something in him changed. He became indifferent and with time, this indifference turned to disdain. My mother was at her most vulnerable, left waiting for him to return as he socialised with colleagues and students from his evening classes. The landlady who lived on the top floor of their apartment block would scold him as he walked in late; she pitied my mum. She would try to console her by inviting her to join her in prayer groups. As my mother's pregnancy advanced, so did his rejection for her, until it was evident that he was having an affair. They no longer slept in the same bed. From being his wife, she

became his maid. She would wake up at five in the morning to heat water up for his baths, make his breakfast, wash, and make food. Sitting in an empty apartment, she felt perhaps what my grandmother had experienced so many years ago, an immense feeling of loneliness. It must have been particularly difficult for someone with so much character to feel powerless yet again and increasingly vulnerable as her pregnancy advanced. She begged him to let her stay. Anything would be better than having to return to her father, not like this. As he continued his separate life with this new flame, he simply wished to cut her off. She spent her pregnancy feeling rejected, enduring a pregnancy filled with sorrow. She gathered a small bag with her belongings and set off to Medellin to give birth to me.

The journey was 12 hours long on a bumpy road by coach. She clutched her stomach tight in fear that she would have me right there and then. She made her way home, with her head down, and with a feeling of shame burning through her face. My grandfather ignored her muttering insults under his breath. She went into labour a few days after arriving. Alone in a hospital bed, she gave birth to a healthy baby girl. She had fainted just after I was born and did not get to see me. Once she came around, and I was placed on her lap. She made quite the scandal, as she had convinced herself that her daughter would look like her, with fair, light eyes, light hair. If she had had a boy, he would be dark like the father. Well, I was quite the opposite, taking after my father. She took me in her hands. I was covered in fine black hair and brown skin. The nurses had even considered that it was possible that there had been a switch at birth, as my mum made such a passionate plea for help! When a nurse turned to her and asked her what the father looked like, she froze, said nothing, and held me tight.

This was not the way she had imagined things and was now faced with the cultural shame of being a single mother. This played into the toxic power dynamics between her and Abuelo. She felt that in the end, her father had won. The only thing he had ever told her throughout her whole life was that she would never amount to anything. My father poured salt on that old wound as he took to humiliating her, mocking her for not finishing such an insignificant course as hotel and tourism. He blurted out in their arguments that she was nothing more than a

poor cockroach. With every reason to feel marginalised and with a sense of victimhood, these difficult and challenging life circumstances were the fuel that she needed to draw determination and to envision an alternative future. The Aristotelian concept, *eudaimonia*, (a complete human flourishing) (Nussbaum, 1997), does not directly translate into English but it is argued that its meaning transcends happiness. It is an interesting concept that may describe the unrelenting pursuit of finding happiness beyond wealth, with an unquenching desire to seek liberation.

Becoming a mother made my mother feel a deep sense of responsibility that drove her to seek an alternative future. My mother's journey to Europe and her endeavour to bring all her family out of Colombia and resettle elsewhere draws parallels with the biblical story of Moses. There was something quite prophetic in the story of my family. From a young age, my grandmother had always dreamt about leaving the country, sharing the same feeling of helplessness, like their worlds were cages. After a month of my being born, my father visited me, staying at my grandfather's home. This was the first time he had ever met my mother's family or seen where she grew up. Her cheeks burned with embarrassment as she recognised objectively for first time her reality, her, her family, and neighbourhood for what they were. She tried hard to cover everything up, ensuring that the food tasted good, that the floors were clean, but it was impossible to hide the truth. Despite her strength, she was unable to pretend that she came from a different class. Fights would break out in the streets, with young men running for their lives and others chasing them with machetes.

My father had never seen anything so violent. He left after a few days, and they agreed to salvage their marriage. That first year my mother went back to Bogota to stay with my father. Despite his attempt to patch things up, he was caught up in his own life, paying little attention to either of us. Our presence was more of a nuisance as he continued with his affair. He asked my mother to move to Bucaramanga and stay with his mother. Wherever she went, she felt restless, unable to feel fully accepted. From an emotional perspective, it was one of the most difficult times she faced as she was left to fend for herself and unable to find

work due to childcare demands. She sought legal advice and made a claim for childcare. To add to the fire, my father quit his job and moved to a guerrilla held territory to teach rural children: he did this to avoid paying childcare. There was a particular meanness to his actions, which always managed to take her by surprise. As she arrived in Medellin again with me in her arms, she knew that life with my grandfather would be equally unpleasant but having her mum and family by her was more bearable than being met with contempt from strangers.

Her brothers and sisters were all there greeting her at the door, excited that she had come back home. I had just turned one and walked through everyone toddling straight into the room we had stayed in when I was born, as if I was familiar with the house. The relationship between my grandfather and mother was tense; neither of them spoke with one another. My grandfather was feared by the whole neighbourhood but to everyone's surprise, my presence in the house unlocked a tender side to him. He would be caught peering over at me when I was sleeping and sometimes making funny faces at me. My mother had always spoken to me as though I was able to understand her, regardless of my infancy. She would carry me in her arms and whisper words of comfort. She would tell me to never be afraid of Abuelo, regardless of whether he shouted; she said that he could not hurt me.

I do not ever remember being afraid as a little girl. One of my earliest memories is of my mother holding a large blue plastic cup and drinking water with blood dripping down from her mouth. I remember a crowd of people around us, in some sort of courtyard. My grandfather had punched my mother across the face because my father had called. My mother moved in a few doors down with one of her friends. What may strike people as unusual is that I formed an unbreakable bond with my grandfather, adoring him. We did everything together. I remember sitting on his lap when at the dinner table, eating from his plate, taking away the nicer part of his meal like the avocado and plantain. I would fall asleep on his fat belly, as it moved up and down like an accordion. He slept with a revolver under his pillow. During the first three years of my life, my mother was met with a torrent of bad luck and no work opportunities opened for her. The only place that took her in

was a run-down coffee shop by a sidewalk opposite the infamous offices of Pablo Escobar.



Figure 26 Left: My grandmother and me as a new-born. Right: My mother holding me as a new-born.



Figure 27 Left: My aunts and uncles in Colombia during the time when the Gallera–Cockpit was being constructed. Right: Aunts and uncles in Colombia.

Looking impeccable, she stood out like a sore thumb. On her first shift, a few 4x4's parked outside the café and out came a number of men who were clearly *mafiosos* by the way they were dressed. They became alarmed when they saw my mother, thinking that something was not right. The lady who ran the shop assured them that she could be trusted, and the men had their coffees. Just before they left, one of them approached her and insisted on taking her home. This was a way to corroborate her story. He was known as *alias Pájaro* – one of the cartel's hitmen who worked closely for the *cartel de Medellín*. As he drove her home, he inquired about her. He was puzzled how she had ended up working in a place like that receiving just a few pesos. As the months unfolded, they became friends. He began to understand her life and everything that had happened to her. She spoke dispassionately about life, and these two very unexpected individuals connected through a shared disillusionment in life. She was probably the first woman he had come across who wanted nothing materially from him. My mother had no intention to settle for a house and a man who could be killed at any moment. I faintly remember him, as he carried me. He wore a cowboy hat and had a light brown moustache that came down slightly past the tips of his lips. I felt fond of him.

As I was approaching three, my mother made various inquiries about emigrating. Australia seemed like a plausible option, but she had to wait for a few years to process her application because of me. During this time, my grandmother's sister-in-law was visiting from London. She had emigrated seven years ago. My grandmother had taken in her children for a few years as she settled in the UK, and she felt indebted to repay the favour. The agreement was that my mother would travel to the United Kingdom and my grandmother's sister-in-law would help her settle in; my mother could live with her for six months. The only condition was that I had to stay behind.

This had been the opportunity my mother was waiting for. My grandmother reassured her that she should take the chance and that I would be well looked after. My mother had enough for her airfare, passport, and visa application but she was missing a few hundred dollars that she needed to show on arrival. She went to *el Pájaro* and asked him for the money. He tried to persuade her to stay. He asked

whether she would really prefer to clean the shit of gringos than live in Medellin with him, but he knew that no amount of wealth would change her mind. There was nothing that Colombia could offer. Filled with disillusion, Colombia typified the oppression she had endured throughout her whole life and leaving would be a fresh start. My mother has always told me that leaving me behind was the hardest thing she has ever done. I have now long forgotten how she whispered into my ear, promising that she would send for me as soon as she could. We drove to the airport and *el Pájaro* was already there, although uninvited. He was standing by and managed to say his final goodbyes. Perhaps in his own childlike illusion, he was hoping that she would not leave, and that happiness would flourish, and both their lives would become absolved from their own nightmares. My grandfather was there, holding me. He and I were inseparable, like two children. We would play endlessly and had our own little world. Everyone who knew my grandfather could not quite believe how a little girl had managed to bring tenderness to an ogre of a man. My mother recounts how she cried as she said her goodbyes. She speaks of feeling like the anguish of leaving me behind was an out-of-body experience. As she sat in the window seat, her tears rolled endlessly down her cheeks.

My days were filled with sunshine. I remember looking up at the sky, and with every aeroplane that flew by, I would ask if Mum was there. Although I acknowledged my mother's absence, there was not a moment for me to feel alone. I would jump in the car with Abuelo, and we would go about a busy day together. He would take me in the morning to look at the dozens of chicks we had, the birds, and the dogs we owned. The backyard was full of roosters, which made their weekend debuts in the fighting ring.

Every Sunday, I would put on my favourite dress and walk into the cockpit. The atmosphere was loud, with men and women drinking and gambling, shouting as the cocks circled and flapped their wings, ready to fight. For me, it was home, and by the age of three, I had developed an eye for the winner, with *Abuelo* frequently putting money down on the rooster of my choice. As I walked through the crowds, fearless, knowing most of the loyal punter, I would make them giggle as I placed bets and cheered on in a very adult world. As I continued to win *Abuelo's*

love, I felt protected. Our relationship was like that of children. We would fight over trivial things like him taking too large a bite of my ice cream or being the brute and violent man that he was, although he was never like that towards me. My reaction to all his aggressions was always the same: they never turned into fear.

One of the guard dogs we had was a black Doberman bitch, who became pregnant. She had eaten a couple of his roosters, so the rage overcame him. I remember he threw a large pot of boiling water on her. The dog shrieked and I screamed at him and refused to speak to him for weeks. I became the only one in the house who had ever managed to calm him down. Whenever he was angry, and on the verge of beating any of my uncles or aunts, I would hold his hand and rub his belly, telling him not to hurt them. There was an immense responsibility placed on me as a mediator. I forgave him because I could never stay angry at him for too long. At the end of the day, he was the only father I had ever known. He would sound his horn playing the *cucaracha* melody. I would jump up from wherever I was to go and sit in the passenger's seat full of glee. I do not remember missing my mother during those few years; I was enveloped in a world of nature, animals, play, and parental love.

My mother's experience was very different. She, on the other hand, was in a foreign country and could not speak much English. When she arrived in London, she was thrust into a new world as an illegal immigrant and without a moment to reflect on everything that had happened until that point. She continued to live in anguish, constantly thinking about my safety. She had good reason to, the *Gallera* was no place to bring up a child. There had already been a couple of shootings inside the premise as men were caught cheating whilst gambling. It is difficult to describe the atmosphere there because it was so peculiar. It was the watering hole for the police, the gamblers, the *mafiosos*. All my uncles and aunts worked at the establishment, either cooking, bartending, guarding, charging at the door, or collecting bets. You could find top-ranking police officers sitting next to a *mafioso*, playing cards next to one another and betting on the winning rooster. The corruption was brutal in Colombia: during that time everyone had a price. Everyone was armed but cherished their local watering hole and were reluctant to create too

much chaos. I remember *Abuelo's* friends always sporting their heaviest gold chains and colourful shirts.

In what must have felt like another planet compared to our lives back in Colombia, my mother had found a job the very next day after she arrived in London in a Greek restaurant. Her experience working at the bar during her course in Bogota came in handy. She worked in a male-dominated environment with loud Greek male colleagues poking fun and testing the waters. She learnt to speak Greek faster than English. My mother, who was used to hard work, took to her job like a duck to water. Her boss became somewhat of a father figure and sympathised with her struggle and determination to bring me to London. Perhaps he could sense the need in her eyes and willingness to take anything that came her way. She started working that very same evening and stayed working there illegally for the next five years. It took her two and a half years to send for me. The difficulty was to find someone with British citizenship who was willing to write an invitation letter. As the months and years rolled by, my mother met an Iranian minicab driver, and they started dating. He agreed to help and sent the invitation letter for my grandmother and me.

The final year before my arrival, my mother had noted a shift in my attitude; my memory had become blurred, and I began calling *Abuela Mamá*. I would only stay on the phone for a few seconds to say that I loved her and quickly give the phone back to *Abuela* if I was busy playing. Those phone calls cost her a small fortune. She recalls the red telephone booths outside in Regent's Park and a pocket full of coins. The calls would always leave her in bits, feeling like she had made the biggest mistake. Lighting one cigarette after another, she would gulp straight shots of liquor to stabilise her nerves. The advice she was given by other women who had also immigrated to the UK was to enjoy herself. She did not have to bring me over; it would only cause her unnecessary hardship and get in the way of her making money. There was a trend with most of the first wave of Colombian migrants in the UK to leave their children to their mothers and provide financially for them. The ugly truth was made bare very early on: there was nothing for my mother to hang onto. Her only hope rested in being lucky enough to marry someone who could give

her citizenship. Her second worst nightmare, besides something horrible happening to anyone in Colombia, was that she would be caught as an illegal worker and sent back. Everything that she earned was sent back to Colombia. This was before the likes of Western Union. She would flatten the envelopes with foil paper filled with notes, hoping the hidden notes would go undetected in her parcels. My grandfather was set up with a steady flow of income. The first airfare was supposedly for me, but something happened with one of her younger sisters that made getting her out of Colombia an imperative. Each setback ate away at my mother.

Among the other illegal immigrants gathered in my mother's small one-bedroom north London flat that sat next-door to a shoe repair shop, were a group of women anxiously waiting to hear whether my aunty had managed to make the crossing and pass immigration. My aunty was barely 17 when she made her connecting flight from Colombia to Brussels and then to London Heathrow. The hours went by, and there was no phone call. Everyone knew something had happened. My mother could not show herself at the airport for fear that she would be sent back, so she stayed waiting at the house. My mother's boyfriend at the time made inquiries about her whereabouts at the information desk. They informed him that she had been denied entry to the UK and sent back to Brussels. Being an unaccompanied minor, thousands of miles away from home and knowing no one in a foreign country was a worse fate than that of my mother's, who at least had someone to settle her in when she had arrived at London. The phone rang and it was my aunty calling from Brussels. Through sobs, they gave one another courage. Through obscure networking, a Colombian family was contacted who took my aunty in. The plan was that she was then to stay in Brussels and help my mother bring the rest of the family to the UK. There is something rather peculiar about Colombians, which I have come to appreciate the older I have become. There is always a Colombian who knows of a Colombian somewhere in the world. The first thing that we ask when we need anyone is 'Do you know of a butcher, hairdresser, etc...' and it is through word of mouth that we source our services. It has very little to do with price, location, convenience, or ratings; it is always about a person's recommendation. Our community system was what helped my aunty find a

household that would keep her until she found work as a house cleaner and slowly began to build an undocumented life for herself. My family had no grasp of the asylum process or any government help that could offer her refuge.

Now between both, they began sending money to Colombia together. As violence continued to erupt in Colombia, there was a greater urgency to bring everyone over as quickly as possible. My grandfather had several near-death experiences throughout his life. He was mistaken for one of his sons by two bandits who stood in the garage entrance. My uncle's back was turned, and he managed to move as a bullet narrowly missed him. My grandfather heard the commotion, grabbed his rifle, and fired shots from the stairs. Those situations were quickly dealt with, and as he knew everyone, so he soon found out who they were and arranged for them to be killed before they had a chance to come back again. I had already turned five and was about to start school. I was feeling nervous, and curious about how that would be. My days were unscheduled and full of play.

As we planned for my trip, I remember leaving the many toys behind that my mother would send for from London. There were magnificent soft toy parrots and dolls. I do not think I played much with them; they were so pretty they were hung in the room like ornaments. I remember feeling so sad about my *Abuelo, mi gordo*, 'my fatty,' 'that was what I called him. We were both heartbroken to be away from each other.

To leave Colombia, my father had to grant permission and authorise my travel. During my years in Colombia, he had never once come to visit me or inquire whether I was fine or in need of anything. He was a stranger to me, and I remember feeling a strong resentment towards him. I had never been shielded from the adult world, and I think I understood on some level that my father had left us. We made a road trip to Bucaramanga, and that was the first time I had gone on a trip before. We stopped by streams to take a swim and to eat, which is a common outing for Colombian families. We arrived at my paternal grandmother's house where my father was living and working close by teaching in a nearby school. I remember he came down the stairs and had shorts on. I remember feeling repulsed when I saw him dressed so casually without a shirt and shorts. It was very hot in Bucaramanga,

and I think I was used to my grandfather always wearing trousers and a shirt. I was a very expressive little girl and showed my disappointment. I had created an image of him in my infantile mind. He immediately understood my reaction, asking whether I wanted him to change. When he came down the second time, dressed, I remember feeling more comfortable, but equally indifferent. I remember that throughout the whole trip I only showed warmth to my grandmother's (*Amparo's*) dog. It was a shaggy dog that I paid more attention to than my father. I am not too sure how long we stayed and whether it was overnight, but I played with the house dog for hours trying to reach it from under a bed.

My father signed my papers. It was the first time he had learnt that my mother had made it to the UK. He was in disbelief that she had been there for over two years. Now as a mother myself, I wonder whether he felt any sense of responsibility or remorse for his complete abandonment for me, whether it made him feel ashamed that his daughter was in the same country without a mother or father. Surely that would be something that any parent would want to know about? I cannot remember feeling much for him. I held on to *Abuelo* firmly because he was my father, and I had received from him an abundance of love and acceptance that was immeasurable against anything anyone else could ever give me. Perhaps *Abuelo* redeemed himself for the mistreatment of his own children and poured all that love and affection into me. The situation with my father was awkward and even as a five-year-old, I understood we did not have a bond. I never thought about him or asked for him. That only came later when I was away from *Abuelo* and in the

UK, when I cried for a father and the notion of being fatherless became visible in the absence of my grandfather.



Figure 28 My grandmother and me during my time in Colombia after my mother had travelled to the UK.

I arrived in the UK in December of 1987. I remember we were seated towards the end of the plane, and the stewardess had given me a fun looking package with small colouring pencils and a book. As the plane took off and we flew deep through the night, I cupped my ears with my hands from the pain of the pressure. Feeling nauseous, I threw up all over grandmother. It was one of the most frightening experiences for both of us. This was not simply a life-changing trip for me; we were both essentially ripped away from our lives and heading towards a complete unknown. I remember short scenes when we arrived and received crushing hugs from my mother as she suffocated me between her arms in

uncontrollable emotion and happiness. I had never felt the cold before, and looking up at the dark grey sky, one of my first questions was, "Where is the sun?"

I found it difficult to adjust and was homesick for over a year, missing *Abuelo*. I remember when we spoke on the telephone, I could hear his voice crack, and we would recount our adventures. He would write to me, telling me how much he missed and loved me, and how things at home were not the same. In one of my favourite letters from him, he wrote that I was able to tame the wildest Lion, just like I was able to tame him. It is the confidence and trust that he imparted in me that accompanied me through some of the challenges I faced as an illegal immigrant. *Abuela's* experience was one of liberation, of newfound freedom. She was no longer afraid of life or of *Abuelo*. She was finally able to leave her small world and understand a different system and way of life which caused an irreversible change in her. Vivekananda (1989) tells the parable about the frog from the well that believed the ocean could never be bigger than his well, which astounded the ocean frog, who laughed at such nonsense. The frog from the well called him a liar, blinded by his conviction that there could never be anything bigger than his well. Similarly, when my mother and grandmother left Colombia, they were confronted by their own limitations and narrow world views. The small wells they had resided in had been convincing enough to make them think that there could never be anything more significant beyond their experiences. The ability to break down these wells, which we create, is a learning process that lasts a lifetime. The expansion of their personhood, which I have had the privilege of witnessing, has not been a single event but a gradual breaking down of continuous limitations, and of continuous growth. The terrain of uncertainty and challenges has been the tightrope they have learnt to walk and overcome, bringing forth a stronger personhood. As more of my uncles and aunts arrived, the promises my mother made were met. My mother had finally had her one wish met, and as she continued to work and provide for her family, she began to become emboldened by her newfound faith in God, making her own path. *Abuela* had to finally leave and head back to Colombia to ensure that the remaining youngest of her children could also

migrate. It would no longer be possible for her to return to the UK as she had overstayed her visa.

I settled in school but found it difficult to make friends. Life in the UK was very fast paced for a year after *Abuela* left. My mum had to pick me up every night close to one in the morning and sometimes later when she finished closing up the restaurant. We had to walk around 20 minutes to our flat and this began to take a toll on me, with my falling asleep during class. On a few occasions during school, I urinated accidentally, and I became introverted. Although I understood English by then, I did not feel comfortable speaking it or interacting freely. As my mum realised something had to change, and she could not keep leaving me at friends' houses, she decided to leave me home alone in the evenings. I was not allowed to turn the oven on: she set a clock on the table, and I had to put myself to bed at seven o'clock. As she slipped me into pyjamas before her evening shifts, I would push up the big window that had to be secured on the side with a plank of wood and wave her goodbye until she turned the corner. We would wave for a few seconds until she would motion for me to close the window and blow kisses to me. This became my new routine. I never once missed bedtime or turned any of the appliances on. I slept with the lamp on in our one-bedroom flat, and as she slipped into bed with me, I would wrap my arms around her.

Soon after *Abuela* had left, my mum continued seeing her boyfriend more frequently. We would sometimes spend the weekends in his home in Croydon. I remember the smell of petrol and leather, which I still find nauseating until this day. I was repulsed by him and could not help but make that abundantly clear. I would make a point of throwing up his food in the car and protest every time we had to spend the weekends in his home. My mother knew that I could be quite difficult if I had not warmed to someone. I would cling to her thighs and pull her back, making it socially awkward, and muttering that I wanted him to go. It was from the ages of six to eight that he began to sexually abuse me. I did not know what it was, and my mother never suspected anything of the sort. In her bid to protect me, I always slept in between them when we stayed with him, as she did not want to be away from me. In my own way, I tried to tell her. I would fall asleep across the bed so

that neither of them had space in bed. Without fail, however, there was not a night that we stayed over when he would not sexually molest me. My hate for him grew, and so did a newfound contempt for my mother. I became increasingly hostile towards her, blaming her for failing to protect me or failing to realise what was happening. I began to wet the bed, suffering from nocturnal enuresis constantly, and instead of developing, I was regressing (Anderson et al., 2014).

Unfortunately, she was not able to piece it together. I was also unfortunately reprimanded for bedwetting. My mother was unable to associate this behaviour with trauma. I can understand how my actions came across as naughty or misbehaving. With so much going on and the demands placed on her, it must have been exhausting to change bedsheets and duvets daily. Cultural displacement is a fundamental issue that is largely side-lined. The mechanisms that are developed in non-western cultures have a local context to them. In this, there is no blame, but rather the uprootedness that comes with immigrating illegally exposes women and children to harm. The pressures placed on her as an illegal immigrant and a single mother was the breeding ground of this hostile environment. My attitude towards him did not improve despite the endless gifts he gave me or his kindness. I received the gifts forcefully, saying thank you, and would move away and play quietly. After six years had gone by, I remember confiding in one of my closest friends, she was the pastor's daughter. My mother subsequently found out and her face dropped, as it was too much for her to bear. Her first question was why I had never told her, but looking back at that episode in my life, I believe I did, in as many ways as it was possible. My silence has been something that has burned me incessantly, as I engaged in introspection and revisited the abuse. In this solitude, amongst the discomfort that lurks in your innermost chambers, a sudden light switched on, and a wave of relief as the realisation hit me that I had always spoken up.

From an educational standpoint, little emphasis is given to learning about the self and the importance of being alone. The Yogic teachings emphasise the workings of existing within solitude, worship and contemplation (Rao, no date). Whenever I said that I did not want to be taken, that was me speaking up. Through

child regression, I acted it out, through physical rebellion and discomfort, expressing the overwhelming trauma I experienced.

Their relationship eventually fell apart. As my mum found comfort in God and our tiny one-bedroom apartment became the landing pad for the steady flow of our family members' arrival, she continued to distance herself from him. Ultimately, she refused his marriage proposal, no longer feeling that she owed him anything: the tight bonds of duty began to loosen. My mother stopped working at the Greek restaurant shortly after immigration paid us an unwanted visit to our house. What seemed to me to be giant officers knocked on our door. I stood in between them and a few of my aunts while my smaller cousins occupied themselves playing on the carpet. Nobody spoke any English except for me; crouching down, they asked where my mummy was. I was, at this point, well aware that we ran a risk of being sent back to Colombia and had to be careful not to say anything. I felt a rush of confusion as they gently held my hand and told me that they only wanted to help my mummy. If I told them where she worked and what school I went to, they would make sure we remained safe. As my aunts looked at me blankly, asking me in Spanish what they wanted, I told them everything. They made notes on their pads and left. Someone had reported us. As my mum walked in after her shift, everyone quickly gathered around her, frantic, and confused. She looked at me and asked me to repeat exactly what I had told them. Her cheeks paled as I repeated and tried to reassure her of their promise that they would help us. It was not safe for us to stay there anymore. We packed our things, and for the next few weeks, we sat on a bench across from our flat in case they came again. We would stay out until quite late into the night. My mum resigned that week from the Greek restaurant and found a job working as a housemaid. Tired of hiding, she resigned herself to the possibility of being sent back and decided to apply for asylum regardless of the chance of deportation. This was the first chapter of our lives that resembled normalcy. A cloud lifted, and we started living without the crippling fear that had dominated so much of our lives.

6.2.3 The Emergence of a Matriarchy

Our asylum process was long and exhausting. By chance, my mum had met a lawyer who took her appeal case. We applied on the grounds of compassion. As the church became an integral part of our safety net, it reinforced her hope through faith. The whole church had been in prayer the weeks leading to the decision by the Home Office. The lawyer had received the letter of our appeal, the phone rang, and all I remember is seeing her face light up, as she cried, and thanked her repeatedly: we were no longer illegal.

Our church was a lively place. Standing tall behind large trees, we would make our way across the park and into one of the rented halls. The musicians would be setting up their instruments. The church was like an extended family to many of its Latino members. As everybody kissed and greeted, there would be huddles of women gathered next to the coffee area, talking enthusiastically, and sharing deep and personal stories of everything in their world. The room hummed with its members' chitchat. It was a female pastor who ran the church and looking back at our time spent with its members, it was quite a progressive church in some respects. Being led by a female brought a breath of fresh air to my mother, who had only known dominant men. As our family slowly began to settle into their new lives, some arriving in Brussels, and the others in London, the dust began to settle as everyone adjusted to their new lives.

A lot of my childhood was spent after school at the house where my mother cleaned. I used to make up stories as I roamed their garden. On special occasions, I would be entrusted with the most wonderful antique children's books that they owned. Their home captured my imagination, the dark and abstract large paintings that hung all around their five-story house. As I moved from primary school on to secondary school, life continued monotonously. With each of its steady beats, it allowed us to achieve stability. During secondary school, I enthusiastically engaged with schooling. Although I had always loved books, and for years my mother had bought various animal encyclopaedias, I would read the odd paragraph and spend hours looking at the pictures. Still, I could not progress, and become a disciplined reader. My early experience with womanhood was confusing in many senses. I had

no real grasp of what I wanted to do, and I had found little help in carving out those interests from my formal education. I completed my GCSEs and moved onto A-levels but equally with the same hazy grasp of any real identification of myself.

My first head-on collision in understanding some aspect of 'Who am I' came when I moved away from home at 21 years old to make a new life with my first son's father. This was a wonderful experience in as much as it had to be a disaster. Otherwise, I would have missed the ability to learn about my own strength and determination to guide me to a path of empowerment. Living and working in Brussels provided the necessary drab feeling that facilitated the envision of an alternative future. This dissatisfaction was a necessary force for me to decide that I wanted to go back to the UK and start a new life for my baby and me. It was difficult to come to terms with my own immaturity and precipitous nature. I had to also absorb the enormity of my actions of bringing a new life into the world. My Karma – actions were incredibly selfish, which is the only outcome when one lives on autopilot, driven by the irrationality of emotions and senses. A proverb found in Matthew (15:14) reads: "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." The blindness came from ignorance. I had not taken time to understand myself but had allowed life to happen and living in a state of reaction rather than action from awareness. Whilst everything else around me tumbled, it was an opportunity through motherhood to seize living anaesthetised. That was the beginning of a more profound realisation in understanding my community and past experiences.

Having been an immigrant child came with both its positive and negative aspects. As you are thrust into a society blindfolded, few opportunities are at your reach, as many of the doors available to us we have to open ourselves. There is a plethora of power dynamics and as you navigate through you become aware of where you fit into it all. For example, I learnt to speak English, read, and write solely at school, unlike most of my peers who had English speaking parents who read to them and engaged in a range of activities with them. I had to make the best of what was given to me. This is not a remark on 'fairness,' but the point that I wish to make is that I had not understood the repercussions of my lived experiences and how

that comes to play out. It is precisely this lack of awareness that propels you to compete in a race without the right running shoes, and then you question why you are unable to make it to the finishing line. This is exactly a point about empowerment if you are propelled to run a race that you have not chosen and are not prepared or trained for. This can also be understood as discrimination, racism, and patriarchy. It is all power dynamics. The moment that you garner an awareness, a critical consciousness, you realise your own power to keep yourself away from these unnecessary races; this is exercising agency.

My return to London was a thorny endeavour, primarily because I felt judgement from a familial and societal level. I could not help but feel that I had walked into a similar ditch that my mother had fallen into with the difference that she had made an extra human sacrifice for me to know better. I think that judgement from myself and others soaked in, taking many years for me to feel comfortable and appreciative of the privilege of creating such a strong bond with my son. You wear the stigma as though plastered on your forehead. A young single mother has most of her life already written out for her, or it felt that way.

The biblical story of Cain and Abel provides a good illustration of stigma. After Cain killed his brother Abel, God marked his forehead, and wherever he went, he was signalled out (Genesis, 4:1–15). I walked into Camden Council's Offices for the Homeless and became housed in a hostel while waiting for a council flat. I felt like I had failed in life. I enrolled on an intensive A-level course, and the drive that I found, in what was one of the lowest points of my life, was remarkable. My engagement with education began from that point onwards. The reason why it was education and not something else was because there was nothing else for me to engage with; everything in modern Western society is linked to the marketplace. Education in that sense, was my 'go to,' for the chance to work in something that could help sustain Daniel and me. There was a place for it that coincided with some of the biggest life lessons that I was experiencing. Motherhood was a transformative experience that gave me a sense of purpose beyond anything I had ever experienced. The challenges of motherhood taught me a great deal about perseverance and determination. The boundless love that one feels for a child

drives you to achieve a greater sense of personhood because they deserve the best version of you possible.

My hostel room was tiny, sitting on the top floor of a large building that used to be an old nurses' home (Toynbee, 2014). In the middle of one of the most affluent neighbourhoods in London, sitting behind railings, lived some of the city's most vulnerable families. It was common to spot the odd famous Hollywood actor walking by, and although you shared the same pavement for that moment, the lives belonging to the hostel were millions of miles apart from its other residents. Living on state benefits as I studied full time and paid for childcare meant that I was left counting the pennies at the end of the week. Sixty pounds a week after paying for food and minimal rent meant that I could not afford a bus fare, so I decided to order a bike from a catalogue and pay a couple of pounds towards it weekly. I would zoom down the busy junctions of King's Cross and make it to class, dripping in sweat as I shuffled past the more composed students.

My thighs began to bulge from all the exercise, and it was liberating peddling to and from class. I felt that I was doing something for myself. My studies came to life during this intense year. This same vitality that was propelling me to continue striving was also materialised in my learning. As I delved deep into the different texts, I began to question and think more deeply. It was the first time I had come across a Socratic teaching method. As I contemplated the discussions and read through the materials that exposed power structures, Marxist and feminist theories allowed me to analyse my own set of circumstances and position myself with greater awareness. That was the initiation of engaging with formal education that brought about a shift in my thinking. For one of the exams in that module, I received 100%. As I shifted from memorising and repeating to questioning the status quo, the work that I was producing reflected a maturing that started to unfold within me. Although it was not necessarily significant to the outside world, it was nevertheless happening on the inside.

Passing all of my A-levels with As and Bs felt like a door had opened that allowed me to continue to move forwards. My mum was so happy. I would be the first in the family to go to university and it reassured her that her efforts to venture

from Colombia had been worth her sacrifice. As I received my letters of unconditional offers, I decided on a career in law. Working part-time as a paralegal gave me great insight into a completely different profession. I felt like I was 12 years old again as I clutched my bag and took in the enormity of the university campus. I did not look any older than anyone else, but my interests, and backstory were different from the average young student, who had fresher's week on their minds. My son, now three, was enrolled in the nearby nurseries, and as I watched him walk in and play in the garden with the other children, I felt an immense sense of gratitude at how far we were coming along as a small family of two. Motherhood had reinforced the lessons of discipline and hard work. As a mother myself, I revisited my mother's life and experiences, bridging some of the differences between us with commonalities. Every evening just after six, we would play a game grabbing the mop and draping a thick blanket like a tent. He would climb inside our sofa bed, and that way avoid the light disturbing him. The room was so small that we only had one ceiling light. As soon as he was inside and dozing off, I would open up my laptop with books piled by my side and work on my assignments diligently, going through contract law, human rights law, property law. The modules turned into terms and the terms into years. I was still living in my one room when I graduated with a law Degree Honours (LLB. Hons.). My son was by now seven years old, and our limited space became ever more challenging.

I was one of a few hundred families living in the hostel, and we attended monthly housing meetings. Residents like me had been waiting for four years or more and we felt great happiness to see families finally rehoused. I finally gathered enough points to begin bidding for properties. I remember it was a cold morning, and as I made my way to see the accommodation together with other bidders, we walked up the steep steps of the empty flat. From that group, I had the least points, and as my son and I held hands walking from room to room, we were quietly hoping that the others would withdraw, leaving us as the only candidates. Gratitude is a beautiful feeling, and in my case, it came because I was allowed to experience some scarcity. As each person refused the flat, it was left down to an elderly man and me. He looked at me and smiled with his eyes, asking if I wanted the

apartment. I could barely answer. He said it would make him happy to know that my son and I would get the apartment. He had a good set of points to bid for other properties. That act of kindness saved my son and me. It came when I felt like I could not take the pressure any longer. I had started breaking down over minor incidents: for example, sometimes the lift did not work. I lived on the top floor and one day on my way up, one of my shopping bags tore. The fruit bounced down the stairs with everything spilling. My young son looked at me helplessly as I struggled to pick everything up. I slumped down on one of the stairs, face in hand, feeling like a failure. I was at the point where something had to give. There were weekly disturbances of domestic violence, needles left in the rubbish room and so forth. Moving out after four long years was a significant battle won, giving both of us a sense of accomplishment.

From a feminist lens, there is a power structure at play, and I understood it from a lived experience as I entered the workplace. The ability to provide for myself and my son gave me some freedoms. The limitation of associating empowerment just from a wealth perspective and through a feminist lens limits the complexities in the multidimensional phenomena that is empowerment (Page and Czuba, 1999).

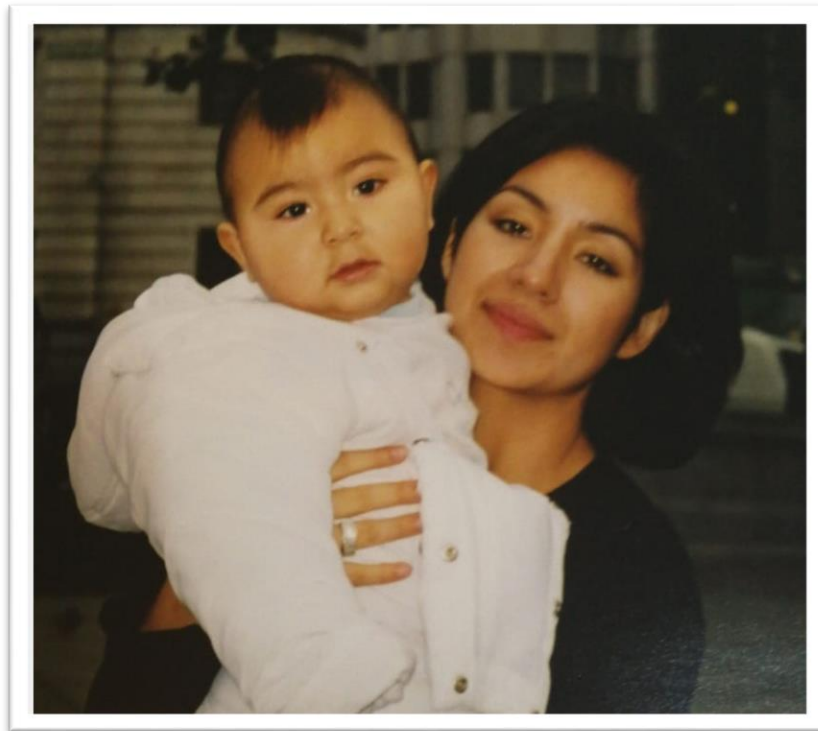


Figure 29 My son Daniel and me in London.

From a human capabilities perspective and the work produced by Martha Nussbaum (2000, p.71), a central question asked by the capabilities approach is “What is one able to do and to be?” This diverges from “How satisfied am I?” and “How much in terms of resources am I able to command?” which is closely associated with feminist theory. It was precisely this shift away from the command of resources, which is power focused, to entering into a reflective journey that prompted a deeper examination of digging deeper into where I was positioned and what I wanted in terms of an existential experience.

The hamster and the wheel are powerful analogues that depict the false perception that one is advancing at top speed. There is an endless pursuit of goal acquisition, which one hopes can be converted into the currency of happiness (Vivekananda, 1989). As my curiosity and drive became semi-dormant, I caved into the pressures and demands of providing and surviving. I settled for monthly pay, and comfortable offices where I clocked in and clocked out. There loomed a sense of underachievement. There was a lack of caring in my profession. It was target oriented and even though it paid the bills, I was unsatisfied. Sometimes after work, I would ask myself “Is this it?” The feelings of discomfort, sometimes in greater or lesser degrees, have been a common thread throughout my grandmother and mother’s lives. They have both been able to respond and act to bring about change to their lives. Their actions and choices have not followed a manual. In that sense, they have been their own captains.

I had the opportunity to travel with my grandmother and mother to Colombia again, and visit my grandfather before he died, and meet my father after so many years. Despite the differences in our lives, the trip back home only reinforced our common shared womanhood. It was a life-changing experience because I asserted everything that I knew deep down. Regardless of the differences between women, we can unite in a way that I think is particular to women. Visiting Colombia and going back to the house that we had lived in, and the neighbourhood brought to life the degree of empowerment. Meeting my father and entering into honest conversations with him enabled me to understand the truth of his absence

and the hurt his actions had caused my mother. Away from emotionalism, and resentment, I was able to come away and value my mother so much more.



Figure 30 My grandfather and I reunited during my trip to Colombia.

An observation of the Colombian *Machista* culture is a tendency to accept male irresponsibility and excuse them. What my grandmother and mother experienced, and, to a lesser degree, my own experiences, are not novel. What I believe to be particularly striking was their courage and determination to seek an alternative narrative to their own stories.

Listening to my discomfort led me to enrol in further education. There has been a direct relationship between learning about me and the usefulness of education. For the first time through the PhD programme, education as a tool lost its rigidity: curriculum has been replaced with research interest. One of the most empowering aspects of pursuing a PhD has been the constant challenges that I have faced with my own thinking and structures. The reflective process of questioning “Who am I?” has unveiled the enormity of my ignorance and inability to identify what is “true.”

This truth-seeking journey had already been carried out by my grandmother and mother before me. They did so mainly through life and its challenges. My mother entered university at the age of 50, matured, and with a solid grasp of understanding herself, she was able to pursue a career in herbal medicine for the benefit of taking back control of her own health. There is, I feel, a great sense of gratitude due for being guided and pushed to think, and to think critically. The essence of learning and the power of education lie in mobilising the learner to enter pools of darkness that reside deep within us. There is an unquestionable assumption that one who is educated knows. I know very little, and this has been the most significant finding throughout this reflective process. My ability to think independently and seek the truth has promoted a change in me that has been transformative. There lies precisely what I have found to be the facilitation of empowerment through education. The spheres of empowerment are diverse and look different in all of the women who have marked my life, particularly in my grandmother and mother. This 'becoming' feels like an expansion of your personhood and the diminishing of judgement.

Freedom and liberation lie at the heart of these stories in this autoethnographic account. Although my grandmother's and mother's struggles pertained to the physical realm, they were able to mobilise and leave because their minds were uncolonized from a Western capitalist perspective. In my case, it is a continued journey of mental liberation from the structures and uniformity that are placed by formal education. It has ceased to be about education and a job to be entirely about seeking truth. When one can peel away the veils that shroud our mind, learning becomes a lifelong endeavour, and empowerment takes place with the unshackling of independent thought (Vivekananda, 1989). The actions that come forth from this liberation are only a by-product of empowerment's manifestations.

6.3 Findings and Analysis

This autobiography is a reflective piece that depicts the life of my grandmother, my mother, and myself. It is written in a manner that brings the

reader into the complexities of our lives that are intertwined through a familial bond but that overlap in the wider context of womanhood that penetrates society's political and cultural spheres. This is an evocative text using the techniques of "showing," through the emotions and actions that have constructed our characters (Adams, 2006). The new perspectives that are teased out from this autoethnographic piece are the similarities shared, irrespective of the generational gap that divides us. Through this reflective process, a deep sense of strength and solace is found. The challenges depicted in this piece tell the story of resistance, courage, and empowerment.

A crucial finding is that women are empowered, regardless of their economic standing and educational level (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011). This autobiographic account switches from first-person to second person to describe moments that marked our lives. These three ethnographical accounts are intricately woven through each of the three main stories flowing as one account reflecting the continuity of womanhood from mother to daughter. The accounts offer a thick description of the Colombian and British culture, guiding the insider and outsiders into Colombian culture from the 1940s to the 1980s, and immigrant life in the UK from the perspective of a child and a single mother (Caulley, 2008). In this, my humanity is dependent upon others, and I cannot understand my learning independently from theirs. The significance to our collective learning and journey to empowerment cannot be captured through an analysis of statistical data but can only be fully comprehended in search of meaning that demands an interpretive explication. It is precisely these expressions of significance that elaborate on the analysis of culture and depict the webs of experience we have spun (Geertz, 1973).

The cultural aspect of my learning was formed by the lack of censorship of adult life, its challenges, and suffering. This is examined through the technique of ethnography to distil the breadth of wisdom and lessons that would otherwise fall beyond the remits of education with its formal definition. The historical legacies of my mother and grandmother provoke a deep reflection of those hereditary learning experiences that form the basis of my moral and ethical makeup. The context to the personal reflective main research question is shaped by the critique of the formal

mainstream education systems that govern Western societies proposed by the philosophers Ivan Illich (1971, 1973, 1978) and Paulo Freire (1972). 'Education' is therefore broadened to include the learning acquired through informal, non-formal, and formal educational experiences that constrict or foster self-realisation. The familial element to this autoethnographic research study is grounded upon a non-Western approach to understanding culture and humanity (Khomba, 2011; Christenson, 2003).

6.4 Autoethnographic Questions

1) What constitutes empowerment through education?

a) How can you describe this experience(s)?

b) How did this experience impact on your health and wellbeing?

c) What choices were made as a result of this experience that altered your purpose in life? Had you not had this experience, do you think you would have made different choices?

d) Was your family or close community involved or impacted by this experience?

e) What did you learn as a result of this experience?

f) What were the teaching approaches used in these experiences?

The method of analysis for this autoethnographic research question and sub-questions is concerned with understanding people's experiences, views and perceptions whilst providing the necessary flexibility to the construction of meaning by adopting a reflective thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2008). Its advantage lies primarily in its theoretical flexibility, which provides a framework to find patterns and themes within a range of datasets through a rigorous process of data familiarisation, data coding, and theme development and revision (The University of Auckland, 2021). The coding process established four main codes; Challenges, Oneness, Introspection and Spirituality, and 29 sub-themes:

- 1) Challenges
 - a. Resisting
 - b. Freedom
 - c. Separation
 - d. Power imbalance
 - e. Shame
 - f. Bondage
 - g. Patriarchy
 - h. Fear
 - i. Judgement
 - j. Accreditation
- 2) Oneness
 - a. Useful learning
 - b. Informal learning
 - c. Joyfulness
 - d. Gossip
 - e. Useful tools
 - f. The power of laughter
 - g. Virtues
 - h. Love
 - i. Community
- 3) Introspection
 - a. Aspiration
 - b. Memories
 - c. Critical thinking
 - d. Nothingness
 - e. True self
 - f. Confidence
 - g. Ignorance
 - h. Fulfilment
- 4) Spirituality
 - a. Faith

- b. Courage
- c. Sacrifice

The most referenced code was *Challenges*. It appears throughout the autoethnographic text, and it is woven through all three accounts as a fundamental life experience that determines the journey of empowerment. From challenges appears *freedom* and *resisting* as sub-themes, which uncovers a significant pattern of meaning to empowerment. All of us experienced suffering that come with challenges to different degrees. My mother's life was significantly more challenging because of her upbringing, as she did not experience childhood without violence. Our anthropological accounts reveal the expansive webs that are spun in terms of our experiences of struggle and how they are culturally patterned into shared grievances (Kleinman, 1995, pp.100–119). Kleinman (1995, p.100) argues from a medical anthropological perspective that illness and suffering have a shared meaning from a personal, interpersonal, and local setting. Yet suffering by analytical models discusses the expansive nature to suffering which is not necessarily perceived by the particular individual that can presume ones suffering ends with them, rather a person's suffering can have a long-lasting effect on families and communities that precedes death and remains vivid for family members that continue to remember the past. The discussion in terms of struggle that embodies suffering is intricately complex but ultimately positive. These settings of struggle or chaos experienced brought about action. These acts of courage and resistance were the inception of freedom and liberation. Peterson (2018) argues that the chaos in our lives needs to be confronted and turned to order. This process of confrontation resolves two forms of misery; chaos and hell (Peterson, 2018, p.275). Hell is more of a reflection of the consequence of action that in Hindu science is known as *karma*.

The pools of darkness that ravage through our lives are not only necessary but needed so to permit a confrontation in which we take conscious action that leads us a step closer to understanding the "Who am I really?" From a yogic scientific lens, there are only two kinds of sufferings: physical suffering and mental suffering, but due to our inability to create a separation between our True Self and

our mind, we continue to suffer (Sadhguru, 2019). The link between suffering and empowerment exists in our lives in the fine space between these two phenomena, an invisible force that has separated us with the entangled thought that we are suffering.

The Hindu story of *Saumya* related the splitting of the tiny seed of a fig and uncovers the power of that “nothing.” Know this: *Saumya*, that “nothing,” which you cannot see, is that “nothing” from which the giant *nyagrodha* grows. It is because of that “nothing” that the giant exists at all. It is that “nothing,” *Saumya*, believe me, that is the self, *Atman*, of the world. That is the finest, most subtle essence of everything, the soul of everything, the root of everything, the scaffolding on which everything else stands. That is the truth. That is the real. That is yourself, your *Atman*, too (Pai, 2019, p.362).

Overcoming the many struggles discussed through the autoethnographic piece has taken us that bit closer to becoming the women we are today. There was a strong spiritual undertone throughout the lives of my mother and grandmother. Faith and hope have been anchors throughout all our lives. There is an extensive literature in classical and contemporary sociology on the generally positive relationship between faith and wellbeing. The mechanisms that create this link are found in community, hope, meaning systems, values and virtues, and rituals (Perry, 1998). The reflective process that we have each undergone through different mechanisms has allowed us to revisit the past and present and establish systems that give meaning. My mother and grandmother cling firmly to religion as their preferred mechanism whilst I have followed a less rigid interpretation of religion and explored meaning through a range of authors and close friends. For example, my preferred prayer is walking through nature, saying little to allow a feeling of closeness to guide me. If one takes a bird's eye view of my mother's life, and the years that preceded after she had me, when her world felt like it was crashing in; She interprets those string of events through her religious lens as necessary for her to leave Colombia and a path that led her to encounter a meaningful relationship with her God. In that sense, suffering has never symbolised the ultimate experience of life. From an empowerment perspective, the resistance that my grandmother

showed throughout her life was also her way of protecting her children and herself; there was a sacrificial nature to her actions that embodies caregiving, which makes sense from an insiders perspective but not necessarily from an outsider looking in (Kleinman, 2020).

The ethnographic account of my grandmother's life refers to freedom as an essential characteristic of her childhood. Her relationship with nature and her informal and non-formal education were the tools that helped her overcome the 30 years of domestic abuse she later endured. Figure 31 shows the most coded nodes, capturing the meaning of challenges from an empowering ethnographic account. As shown in Figure 31, the code, 'separation,' is the second most coded. The ethnographic accounts discuss the challenges that arise when we lived by a state of separation depicted by ruptures in relationships, physical distances, and my own separation from my mother when I was left in Colombia. Those pockets of separation similarly formed opportunities for new relationships and perspectives. Figure 31 indicates the tools that allowed marginalised and rural women, like my grandmother, and deprived women like my mother, and immigrant refugees like me to overcome challenges. The codes represent values and virtues that are intertwined in community wellbeing and forged in useful learning as a gateway to freedom.

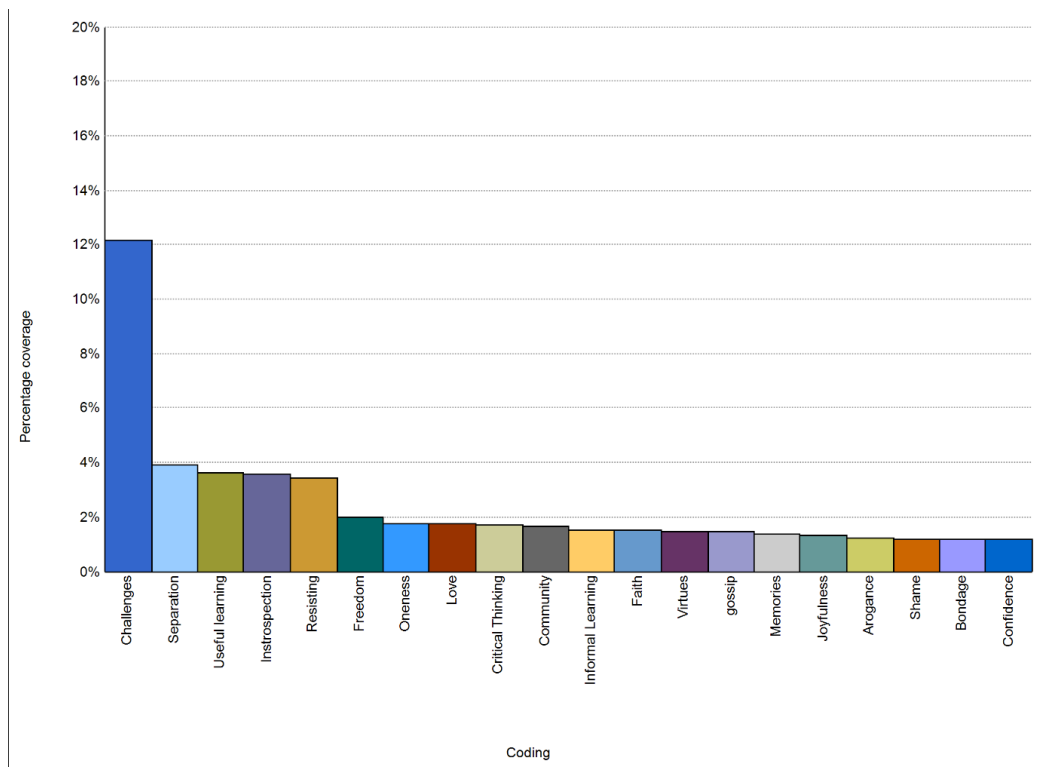


Figure 31 Most coded nodes.

The ethnographic accounts discuss the exploitative nature of material gain and power. The essential component of empowerment is based on freedom. However, when economic progress is at the forefront of any society and the main driver of individual conquest, one is bound by a race that is not of your choosing; ‘Excessive forms of wealth and prolonged formal employment, no matter how well distributed, destroy the social, cultural, and environmental conditions for equal productive freedom” (Illich, 1978). The frustrations experienced because of economic necessity are powerful webs that we spin and continue to do so, believing that there is no other alternative because these are life paths that we do not choose. We are not prepared or trained to succeed and find freedom, but our conditioning maintains a certain obedience to endure discrimination, racism, and patriarchy. The empowerment born from these destructive cycles is the realisation that there is a power within to keep away from these unnecessary races. Similarly, the ruptures from forced life paths are not singular events but are numerous experiences of awakening that rebalance our state into one of harmony fostered by

self-realisation. The *Katha Upanishad* compared the body to a chariot with the True Self as the charioteer:

Know the Supreme self as the Lord of the chariot and the body as the chariot. Know the intellect as the charioteer and the mind as the reins. The senses are the horses, the objects of the senses are the paths through which they travel. The wise declare the self, associating with the body, the senses and the mind as the enjoyer (M, 2017, p.50).

Restraint, according to the Hindu philosophy, is understanding. Thus, someone who dominates the mind can control the senses and reach their goal. If a charioteer has unrestrained horses, it is impossible to reach a destination. Freedom from the Hindu perspective is based on self-governance, which is in stark contrast to the Westernised notion of freedom based on unrestrained action.

The thematic pattern of shame and judgement was found to be prominent throughout all our lives and heavily geared towards the notion of womanhood. The gendered aspect of shame and judgement has societal, political, religious, and local roots that debilitated our social capital and self-confidence at various points in our lives. As argued by Weber (1922), power is the exercise of one's will over another (Lumen Learning, no date). The ownership of one's truth is largely shaped by mainstream education that does not facilitate introspection (Freire, 1972). The question posed by Nachiketsa in the *Katha Upanishadas*, is "What happens to a person when they are free?" This is answered through a long dialogue between the young boy and death. From a pedagogical perspective, the *Upanishad* is a guide that permits the person to discover this truth, through critical questioning and experience. The distinction between good and pleasant arises in the pursuit of truth. Not everything good is pleasant, and not everything pleasant is good. Positioning truth as the moral compass of life and as a pedagogical purpose, that link back to the importance of self-reflection as a central finding in both the literature review and the research conducted (M, 2017, pp.24–29). Regardless of marginalisation or rurality self-discovery is pertinent to everyone and it is not dependent upon economic progress or development. The imposition of truth, which is a strong characteristic of formal education, restricts humans from

participating in the transformation of the world because of conformity as a prerequisite to be integrated into society's logic (Freire, 1972). Resistance to external obedience or obedience without introspection requires to break free from dogma which in turn facilitates the power of learning through experience and the ability to adopt lessons of morality and virtues that have been forged through this lived experience, breaking away from shame and judgement: that is the essence of collective empowerment through pedagogy.

From a societal perspective that includes institutions such as health, education and formal political participation, the power of accreditation is one of ultimate oppression for those who live on the margins of poor and rural communities. As illegal immigrants, we understood first-hand the impotence, discrimination, and racism endured because you are missing a valid stamp on your passport. The imbalance of power caused by such systems left us exposed to vulnerable settings, such as deportation, human rights violations, and sexual abuse. It is argued that those are overdeveloped systems that no longer work to allow people to enrich the environment with their zest (Illich, 1973).

The thematic patterns concerning empowerment are closely linked to oneness and caregiving through community and familial bonds. This autoethnographic account has elicited the meaning of empowerment in our lives. From an anthropological lens, this meaning is organised by a culture into systems of experience with emotions and values (Kleinman, 2020, p.87). In this lies the diversity of empowerment, as this cultural system integrates meaning and influences the way we express the body and understand what is moral and how we foster social relationships. This is vivid in my grandmother's early years and how she construed social relations, which were connected to political and economic cultural webs that affected her adult life in a very tangible and existential manner. The omissions about sex and womanhood that took place under the pretence of religion and notions of purity impacted her negatively when she had to make choices about her life. In one way, she was not educated to think that as a woman, she could decide on how many children she wanted. Her conditioning to obey, in her case through religion had a significant impact on her health and wellbeing. The

usefulness in her learning, both informal and non-formal, was what helped her survive. From a health and wellbeing aspect, she was self-sufficient, and through traditional medicine, she was able to nurse her children when they became ill. Similarly, becoming a seamstress granted her some financial independence and power in an extreme case of patriarchal abuse. The sewing machine as a tool under the proposed framework by Illich (1973), who evaluates [hu]man's relationship to tools and whether they are convivial, allowed her to manage certain challenges and gave her a space of creativity and expression and to explore her very many talents as designer and entrepreneur (Illich, 1973, p.11).

The discussion on conviviality can be further amplified by adopting an anthropological lens to evaluate the impact tools have on the family and the local community. For my grandmother to have mustered some autonomy and power through the sewing machine can be argued as reducing more hardship for her and her children. It could be further argued as a tool that was the buffer between extreme poverty and poverty, a tool that enhanced her own health and wellbeing and perhaps prevented a series of breakdowns.

This tool also facilitated her interaction among the community of women as she was the local seamstress. It provided a safety network to a family that was already vulnerable. The capacity to deal with the challenges endured are formed by intricate webs of cultural systems that integrate meaning (Kleinman, 2020). The 'gossip' code identified in the narrative is an example of a capacity mechanism formed by close-knit communities. It is a powerful communication tool that largely carries a negative connotation and is underrated as an effective communication and information source. There is an interconnectedness with the various capacity mechanisms that make part of the complex cultural systems, such as humour. Humour is a fundamental tool present throughout our lives and an integral defence mechanism that forged intimate relations between my aunts and uncles. Through laughter, they were able to deal with pain and suffering in a way that expanded their health and wellbeing. From a societal level, humour is also primarily used as a defence mechanism and is a vital characteristic of the Latino culture, like music and arts, humour is a defining element of our culture. My family continues to use

humour as a healing mechanism for past trauma and is fundamental to the reconciliation between my grandfather and the rest of the family. From it, forgiveness and love have been able to emerge. The sense of individual importance: the ego that emerges is subdued by the ability not to take yourself so seriously.

This chapter has elicited the practice of love and caregiving towards one another as a fundamental characteristic of our familial bond. My mother would never have been able to make that giant leap to leave Colombia, if my grandmother and grandfather had not taken care of me, despite the grievances between them. These patterns of love and caregiving is the fabric that holds our family together. It is not the romantic notion of Western love, but sacrificial acts of kindness, care, and responsibility that makeup caregiving towards one another. Caregiving continues to play out with the same tenacity as it did when we were living in Colombia. There is an unspoken agreement that as family members reach old age, the caregiving continues, and our elders are to be looked after by the younger generation. Despite Grandmother's age, there is growing respect for her and a sense of adoration by everyone.

From a personal perspective on the reflective process of this autoethnographic piece, engaging in a conscious exercise with past memories, not just of my life but from the perspective of my grandmother and my mother, evoked strong feelings that exposed my ignorance towards their journey of empowerment. This deliberate exercise was difficult to a degree, but ultimately it was a powerful learning experience that helped ground this thesis and validate the notion that women are empowered. The issue is not to empower them but to help facilitate the right settings for this empowerment to take place. One of the strongest breakthroughs that emerged from this autoethnographic piece was to abandon judgement and blame towards myself. I had held myself responsible to a degree for the abuse that I experienced because I did not speak up. By reflecting on this difficult period of my life, I understood that I had communicated my trauma. This was a liberating experience that brought a state of calm to my mind and memories.

Throughout my upbringing, I was always emersed in the stories of my grandmother and mother. As a child, I was never excluded from their life

experiences or from the adult world. We have all lived life together. The ability to withstand challenges is not addressed in this chapter as a question of resilience, rather, this chapter depicts the withstand of challenges as a sensitive affair where people are not portrayed as rubber bands that after experiencing certain trauma can bounce back into shape and appear less affected. I believe I received an honest upbringing that did not shield me from life and its experiences (Kleinman, 2020). This has facilitated my ability to connect with my grandmother and mother as though we are the same woman. This sense of oneness comes from understanding their life stories and being witness to these experiences. It has equipped me to learn about their challenges and responses.

Prayer has been another tool that is used to cope with challenges and express their suffering, joy and gratefulness (Jeste and Lee, 2019). Aspirations and desires are communicated and validated through methods of prayer, and gossip to a large extent. The spiritual elements that ground their belief systems are subjective and they pray accordingly. Their spirituality has also morphed into a form of sanctuary for other family members who deposit their suffering and ask for prayer if they are ill, that has inadvertently turned into a family ritual. Aspirations and the envisioning of the future carry with it a similar ritualistic process of prayer and consultative process between the elder members of the family.

The various channels of open communication used in our family established different platforms for discussion, which do not shy away from confrontation. Although there is a sensitivity, particularly around religion, and respect, the safety mechanisms of humour play are an essential part when discussing difficult topics. The Bible readings and sermons of the church were an important pedagogical experience that provoked a deeper reflection of morals and values for my family, in particular for my mother and grandmother.

Faith has been discussed at length throughout this chapter, acting at times like an invisible thread holding together the pieces of our lives and actions. The exposure to ancient wisdom has enhanced my own faith and courage, in a very different manner to religion. It has prompted a 'letting go' of ideas about God and the universe, prompting a submersion to learn and seek the truth, in whatever

shape or form that may come in (Popova, 2014). When confronted with the narratives of my grandmother and mother, there lies a sacrificial element underlining their response amid challenges. It is an important recurring theme that ties together the commitment they felt as mothers, and in very different ways, both endured hardships to protect their children and sacrificed their own comforts to provide a better alternative for their children.

Similarly, motherhood was a powerful learning experience that encapsulates a deep commitment of love and responsibility. It has been a palpable life lesson that has made me reflect and adjust my perspective to benefit my child. These are fundamental lessons of humility, sacrifice, and love that are not gender-specific but are available to all humans, adjusting our humanity. Although the relationship between mother and child is not reciprocal to the same degree, one becomes aware of a mother's sacrificial nature when you also become a mother. These are the subtleties of empowerment that colour the lives of women from all walks of life. Kleinman (2019, p.4) unravels the potency of caregiving as the "bedrock of our human existence," arguing that some people, most often women, become caregivers by caring for babies and small children, lessons that are not particular to one gender but are embraced often by women through motherhood and familial bonds.

The main research question for the autoethnographic piece focuses on: "What constitutes empowerment through education?" This is an intentionally broad research question that facilitates the examination of the lives of my grandmother and mother and looks beyond formal education to elicit empowerment through learning as a cumulative and rich experience. The absence of formal education in my grandmother's life disproves the notion that marginalised and rural women need empowerment from external bodies and international actors. There exists a plethora of actions including resistance, perseverance, risk-taking, and endurance that she has exercised freely in her own journey of empowerment. The insidious nature of accreditation and exclusion from formal education can be clearly shown to disempower women by branding them 'uneducated' (Illich, 1970). Her expertise, knowledge, and wisdom lie beyond the

constraints of formal education. Her mastery of the sewing machine provided tangible economic relief to her and her children which positively impacted their health. The intricate networks with the neighbourhood women, who became her friends and clients, were complex social structures that simultaneously provided therapeutic care and safety measures. Empowerment through learning, as represented in this narrative, does not have a beginning or an end. The stories of my grandmother and mother and mine interlink in a delicate flow that represents wisdom shared from one to another. My mother's learning was more varied than that of my grandmother's as she experienced formal education and higher education at different stages in her life. The narrative further shows that the core values and morals that create one's personhood are the foundation of empowerment. Formal education facilitates further development of personhood to a degree, but it can also constrict a person because of the accreditation element. The experiences of empowerment through education are not strictly associated with isolated experiences. What fuels the realisation of empowerment is the ability to cope with diverse challenges, and the response one has towards suffering that either crumbles your personhood or serves as an opportunity to walk in freedom and confront the order and chaos of life (Peterson, 2018). The short-sightedness and inability to recognise empowerment as an enigmatic continuum source of power within women establishes a false narrative and universal standard of empowerment. This harms the delicate social fabrics that harness learning through experience. Contemplation is a tool that can induce the awareness of empowerment through education. Being able to remain still in thought allows an increased awareness of our True Self that unravels a path of freedom (Vivekananda, 1989).

My engagement with education developed reciprocally when embarking on my PhD, despite previously having seen formal education as a means to an end. As I elaborate further on this learning journey, some of the elements that have contributed to the facilitation of empowerment lie in my ability to control what I study which stimulates an intellectual curiosity and critical thinking. That is one of the main markers that differentiates my previous education experience with the

PhD. To learn to learn, has become one of the most important lessons and one that is constant. The more I delve into different ancient wisdoms, and the stories of my own family and their experiences, the larger my ocean becomes, reflecting on my own limitations. This is a humbling experience as I acknowledge that I do not know. I am not more than the universe, and so my suffering and challenges cannot be seen as such. From this new perspective stems my confidence: it is no longer based on what I know, but on the fact that I do not know and there I am able to be sure and position myself as a student of life (M, 2012).

From a personal perspective, the experience of empowerment through education and its impact on my health and wellbeing is reflected by an increased fulfilment and contentment. The health and wellbeing issues revolving around working hours and dissatisfaction with work paints an unflattering image of employment chosen primarily because of economic need. A global analysis of the deadly impact of long working hours has shown a 29% increase in deaths from stroke and ischaemic heart disease between 2000 and 2016, with a total estimate of 745,000 deaths reported by the WHO and the International Labour Organisation (WHO, 2021). Within a Latin American context, health and illness are structured around a healing systems, comparable to African and other non-Western community structures, that are formed by family and kinship networks (Kleinman, 1995, p.37). The health and wellbeing aspects that have arisen from a greater sense of control over one's life have benefited family ties. From a personal perspective, these ties have not created family dependency, but on the contrary, they have propelled my grandmother, mother, and myself to venture and explore beyond our geographical, spiritual, social, and ideological common denominators. This, in turn, has a liberating and enriching effect that looks beyond the biomedical parameters of health and wellbeing. A fundamental lesson that stems from an increased state of wellbeing is recognising between belief and faith. As I continue my journey of empowerment, I have appreciated faith as a liberating tool that does not anchor my belief system to insisting truth is what I believe it to be based on cemented ideological beliefs, but rather, through a state of faith; one is open to the truth in whatever shape it may appear (Watts, 1987). This has enhanced my suppleness of

mind and propelled me to explore traditional yoga as a devotee. There is an inseparability relating to health and community kinship, which I have observed with my family and close friends. The impact of our health ricochets beyond our physical bodies and thoughts, and through this autoethnographic piece I have seen how we are all interconnected in a symbiotic relationship, floating in unison like lifeboats as they mimic the motion of waves.

The fundamental teaching approaches used in these experiences stem from life's challenges that provoke a reaction. That is where the learning that has impacted your personhood surface. There is a plurality to the teaching approaches that have shaped our experience of empowerment. If we draw on the Chinese tradition, which understands suffering and disappointment as a common expectation to human life, our gratefulness for the unnoticed miracles like breathing become more pronounced. Learning beyond formal education is something that is available to everybody, and it is the learning that cultivates the personhood that facilitates the experience of empowerment, not as singular events that can be marked in our calendar but as a sequence of never-ending reactions that move us closer to a state of complete freedom and liberation. Autoethnography as a technique has elicited a complex narrative of the women before me, painting their lives and mine is a method that has provided an authentic experience to self-reflect.

6.5 Conclusion

The main research question to this autoethnographic narrative is to examine what constitutes empowerment through education, in its broader sense. This is an essential component in answering the makeup of all the different educational experiences that led to empowerment. In our distinct yet interlinked narratives, the underlying theme is empowerment. Moreover, the learning has come from challenges, a resistance present in our stories, yet it does not take away from the vulnerable settings we were exposed to (Butler, 2020). Intergenerational learning can be implicitly observed through the choices and determination in the face of uncertainty. The adaptability, which has allowed for our lives to be built and rebuilt,

is crucial in what constitutes empowerment through education. These are lessons not observed in a formal educational setting, yet it can be argued that the exclusion and rigidity of formal education have led to a significant disempowerment in our experience as women from non-Western societies. The frustrations of mainstream education lie in its inability to recognise learning beyond its formal remit. This forms part of the discrimination, sexism and racism that continues to be prevalent in modern societies that hold the institution of education as the cumulative provider of learning (Illich, 1973).

The education that formed the personhood of my grandmother and my mother, in particular, was largely non-formal and informal, and if one adopts a narrow interpretation of education, their experience of empowerment would ultimately be disregarded. This observation is interlinked with a Western inability to recognise the diversity of empowerment not through the operationalisation of body but of thought. Understanding empowerment as a multidimensional process that enables the control of one's life and circumstances needs to be established within the ideal that the universe in itself is plural, and consequentially empowerment too will be manifested within this same plurality (Kleinman, 2020, p.170; Page and Czuba, 1999).

This reflective journey has unveiled the arrogance that has crippled my ability to engage fully in my grandmother's and mother's empowerments and leave aside my judgement of them as vulnerable and 'uneducated.' As humbling as this reflective process has been, it has provided a steep learning experience as I have incorporated their wisdom and acts of empowerment as pinnacles of my own personhood.

From a wider social context, this autoethnographic piece looks at establishing the empowerment of marginalised and rural women as exemplary models, who can provide valuable moral and ethical lessons to the modern Western model of empowerment that is centralised on economic growth through external modes (Foulds, 2014). This autoethnographic piece strengthens the thesis further, supporting the findings of the scoping review and the narrative literature review that determine empowerment as a quest to ultimate freedom and liberation

and linking it to a wider community and social kinship. The uncolonized minds of my grandmother and mother allowed them to venture to a different continent and establish themselves as free and independent. This was without the security of education and its powers of accreditation. Their natural response to adversity cannot go unnoticed, and their magnificent manner of reinventing themselves through their own spiritual and familial links is an inspiring story to many Western women who hold on tight to their beliefs of progress and privilege. Many women in better economic positions would be unable to endure what they endured and come away victorious. Their response does not fall within the descriptive ambit of 'resilience.' Our response was much more human, as we experienced hurt, and irreversible changes but were able to be moulded in a supple manner. A family saying that is often uttered by these remarkable women is "*bailamos al ritmo que nos tocan*" – we dance to the rhythm that they play.

7 Findings and Analysis: Virtual Community Observation and Participation

7.1 Introduction

The observation of the virtual community critically examines the relationship between its women members, and the learning within the virtual community. As a dynamic network, the virtual community's members are part of wider communities and pedagogical influences through cultural, social, political, and geographical exposure that infuse the virtual community with diverse thought. The members gather to discuss approaches to issues within the humanitarian system through a feminist lens. Through the observation and participation of this virtual community the experience of empowerment is palpable. In this, the vibrancy of the member's experience and learning is captured by the integration of the researcher as a member of the community.

Due to the nature of the virtual meetings the experience of a phenomena is diluted by transcribing information exchanged. The group dynamics are missed by only documenting what is said which fails to capture the vivacity, feelings, silent interactions that buzz through a virtual setting. Considering this, a Gonzo journalistic style is used that does not claim objectivity, but rather captures the experience of the virtual network's learning dynamic through a first-person narrative (Thompson, 2012). In this emersion the reader experiences the virtual community not as a static meeting exchange between its members, but as a community that has goals, principles, beliefs and objectives (Kleinman, 1995). The tensions and amalgamation of ideas are all part of the experience of empowerment through education. In addition, the methodological framework, and methods that sets out a qualitative research design incorporates a Gonzo thematic analysis that allows for a flexibility in this virtual ethnographic method.

7.2 Background

The observed virtual community is a large well-structured organisation with over 40 members that drive a social justice and feminist agenda in the humanitarian field. The organisation's membership is 70% Women's Rights Organisations from the Global South and 30% international agencies that predominately sit in the Global North, as shown in Table 7. This is an important ethos to this virtual community as it ensures to operationalise a feminism that embraces intersectionality, decolonial and anti-capitalist perspectives (Struckmann, 2018; Kral, Covarrubias and Iturribarría, 2012). The network brandishes an array of women members from all over the world and is zealous in its organisational structure to ensure that it is not dominated by the colonial legacy that continues to haunt the humanitarian system (Jayawickrama, 2013). The virtual community tightly monitors participation, funding opportunities, and membership allocation resulting in the network inheriting a power dynamic reflective of a Global-South led Feminist agenda. The ethos of the community looks at rejecting some of the less favourable power dynamics of the global humanitarian system, although, still operating within the system. In this, there is a system within a system. The overcoming force of this virtual community is in the *community* element that has surged from this group of diverse women meeting regularly and interacting first and foremost as women and secondly as members to one organisation. They have a sense of friendship and comradeship which spills into a notion of collaboration (Kleinman, 2020; Solnit, 2009). There is a plethora of dynamics which occur at the interaction level of the virtual community. Thus, this observation is not primarily interested in the content of dialogue, but in the interaction between members and how they work towards their common goals, how these members learn from one another. The detail of the education that occurs in this virtual community is largely implicit. Its obscurity roams in pockets of listening as the members virtually huddle to listen to one another, and democratically agree on the next steps. The leadership observed between members has highlighted an intergenerational leadership as being the most effective. This intergenerational leadership has encompassed the difficult task of leading with *presence* (Kleinman, 2017). The barriers of

professionalism, although systematic, fall short in injecting the group with cohesive structure.

Although, to the naked eye the group that benefits a more stable connectivity and dresses with professional protocol may convey a particular image, their ability to manage uncomfortable conversations and awkward silences is less evident. The observations lasted five months and a close relationship with the chair of the community developed (see Table 7). The chair is tasked with managing issues around consent and facilitated a warm introduction. I attended the various committee meetings during the five months and was involved in over 30 hours of Zoom meetings.

Table 7 Virtual community structure.

Virtual community collective goals & objectives	Virtual community components	Member organisations included	Countries of representation	Representing
To support women’s rights actors and movements leading humanitarian action in the Global South. Ensuring their expertise and efforts are recognised and resourced by the humanitarian system.	Steering Committee. They mobilise funding for its members and establish road-map ideas that they present for a broad consultation process.	Women’s rights organisations.	Pacific Asia The Middle East Latin America Africa	Refugee women Women from host communities Single women Widows Women with disabilities Survivors of conflict LGBTQIA+ communities
To convene women and their organisations to collectively build feminist leadership and share evidence and learning to transform the roles of women in humanitarian spaces.	Advocacy Committee. Closely associated with the fundraising committee. The strategic aspect of funding.	INGOs	Global	Worldwide humanitarian organisations
To offer governments and other stakeholders alternative, feminist ways of working, which would achieve the vision of a feminist humanitarian system.	Fundraising Committee. Fundraising initiatives and identifying funding opportunities.	Organisations working internationally headquartered in the Global North	Global	Worldwide humanitarian organisations
To identify and challenge practices that hinder women’s leadership, decision-making, and meaningful engagement in humanitarian action and in the humanitarian system.	Membership Committee. A collective committee on all aspects of the membership.	Individuals engaged in humanitarian action and policy	Global	Worldwide humanitarian organisations
To take collective action at critical moments, to demand that women’s leadership is recognised, and to ensure that women’s rights organisations are included in decision-making spaces that influence the humanitarian system.	Communications Committee. Marketing, social media, newsletter, and all communication endeavours.			

7.3 A Virtual Welcome

It is an odd feeling when you are being welcomed into a new place. It can feel a little bit like starting school. As I sit there looking at my screen and waiting for the Zoom link to load, whilst the cursor goes round and round, I make the last few adjustments to my blouse, patting my hair down in an attempt to look presentable. Then, finally, the screen opens, and the many little squares of smiling strangers pop up. It feels like a virtual colosseum as you are let into the expansion of the internet. I enter the first virtual community observation with group A abruptly halfway through a conversation as someone makes a remark about how exhausted they must be: “You have all of this work on your shoulders. I'm sure it's not been good for the immune system” she says sympathetically. “Ah, it has been such a busy period, but any way we are starting to get to the light at the end of the tunnel. It's so good to talk to everyone on where we are up to and next steps on this call.”

The host brings back her personal plight and ties it tightly like a knot back to the agenda of the day. It takes me a few seconds to gather my senses. I feel like the scattered contents of someone's handbag, being picked up with haste on a busy street. Finally, my eyes sink into the screen as I wait for a virtual handholding from the host. She begins to call out all the members who have joined so far, making a note of the countries where they are connecting from and she pauses eagerly to introduce me, the new member of this community, albeit for a short time. Still, I am made to feel welcome: “And we also have, I will wait to introduce her until everyone has joined, we have Claudia with us as well, who we mentioned in our recent meetings is supporting us to document how we work at the (Group A). In short, we shared more of that in our last member's wide meeting, so Claudia is just joining us. It is her first meeting of (Group A). Remembers it is her first (Group A) call” and with that there draws an inevitable pause which is pertinent to virtual meeting spaces. I respond to the host's warm welcome and almost infantile introduction with a flat tone, still adjusting to this new membership. The greetings continue as members exchange pleasantries. The host makes sure that everyone has arrived and is technologically ready.

The meeting kicks off with a quick round of introductions. What becomes immediately apparent is the international reach of the group and the array of different accents and names that swirl through like walking into an open food market. Next, the women introduce their organisations, and those that represent smaller and local women's groups or NGOs convey an attachment or better put, a relationship with their work and their person: "We are very new, we are only five years old, [haha...] we started our journey in 2015 in the Southern part of Bangladesh, and we are working in women's rights." They speak with bouts of friendly laughter that sound energetic and enthusiastic as they present themselves. As the introductions go around, everyone smiles with the inclusion of one of the member's daughters that confidently sits on her mama's lap; she fidgets slightly and this seems to bring the group ever closer, like when you lean in to hear a story. The member's tone is warm: "Morning everyone or afternoon, my name is (J.A). I am calling in from South Africa. This is my daughter. She is joining our meeting today [haha] looks like!" I quietly observed the other members and whether they show any discomfort or attempts to refocus the agenda onto more serious matters. There was no shift in dynamics, merging friendship and comradery. The members continued to express excitement in this collective research project. As I get to grips with the agenda, what unfolds quickly is that this meeting is heavy with participation from their Global South members, with only one woman representing an INGO and based in London. Her introduction is sharp, polite, and professional, almost orchestrated. I have only just managed to pick up on this subtleness of change because my ears and eyes have grown accustomed to the various busy backgrounds of the other women. Colourful tiled kitchens, with greens and blues that spin in the background as they shift their screens slightly to get better connectivity. Others have their cameras turned off for the same reasons and only turn them on when they come in to say "Hi."

Although my connection is stable and my background sterile, sharing the same proficient setting as the members representing the more powerful organisations, with their backgrounds that boast corporate logos, and others with their blurred filters that remove any personalised features of who they are. I too speak that language of Zoom protocol, and yet I feel more drawn to the rest of the voices, faces, and backgrounds that depict a more

transparent portrayal of their environment. The diverse settings of the members speak through the deep greens, blues, reds and street views that stand as unapologetic backgrounds as the women ask poignant questions and interact freely with one another. The systematic relationship between the political and economic societal landscapes of the different members peers through connectivity issues as some struggle with their internet connection. Their voices cut out midway through sentences that make them quickly resort to typing in the chat. It is these narratives and social histories that Kleinman (1995, p.89) argues are unaddressed when discussing “human problems”, the obstacles to poverty and illness. A member discusses the economic crisis in Lebanon, the electricity shortage, and how the blackouts have affected her work. These are not structured discussions but give insight into the group’s cohesion. Members sigh in solidarity or tilt their heads to the side and tighten their lips in disapproval. From an anthropological lens, these observable dynamics are like digital ethnographic windows that bring out the holistic composition of societies and cultures (Varis, 2014). Each square on my grid view is a local member that transcends the local making to the global through intricate networks and communicative repertoires facilitated by online environments (Georgakopoulou, 2013). This member recounts her week in her thick Arabic accent bringing a fusion of guttural sounds. Her story brings the human element to the results of corruption, mismanagement and policy inaction (Aljazeera, 2021).

As the meeting goes on, an intriguing leadership dynamic unfolds in the busy interaction between these members. I sink deeper into my observation, like when you recline on a cushioned chair. The familiarity and tone of their conversations take me back to the countless gatherings with the senior women and elders in my family. Perhaps, it is the aunty, and motherly tones that ring in my ears. The sturdy collective continuity and belonging that evokes authority with care mangled into one is a common sentiment in the meetings (Kelly and Nocholson, 2021). The expression of leadership among this group is distinct. What stands out is the absence of a rooted location, or a collective culture and place. Thus, there is freedom in this virtual space, offering the richness of language and expression. There is an undeniable intergenerational leadership among these women as

they bring in a fusion of ancestral confidence (Kelly and Nocholson, 2021). Aside from the host's over-politeness and almost apologetic tone, captured by high pitch endings that turn statements into questions, she methodically goes through the agenda. The women are solid in their engagement, unflinching in their enthusiasm, and assertive in their comments. In this observation, what matters are the undercurrents that penetrate through this virtual community and are audible in the unspoken, and visible in the unactioned. As I sit on my desk chair, my eyes move from profile to profile, as I take a sip of my lukewarm tea. I make a mental note of the times I have been held ransom to virtual gatherings in the last year as the pandemic enforced Zoom and Google-meets in the year of global lockdowns. So many of those meetings sported disengaged faces as they half-listened to systematic agendas and professional chatter, as eyes glazed at the screen. People's minds wander as they think about what they will be doing after the meeting finishes. Bingo! That is precisely it; no one's mind was wandering.

The chair warmly reigns in the agenda, adjudicating the 'room' like a referee. If the discussion could be portrayed as physical activity, it would look like the weaving of a tapestry. A collaborative and collective approach is an implicit main goal that underpins the feminism in this network. This meeting displays a sisterly bond between its members. An observable point in today's discussion are the many more members of the Global South than the Global North members. By that, I also mean the presence of member representatives of INGOs that present themselves formally or 'professionally.' Perhaps it is this ratio that has not tipped the balance from sisterhood to disconnection.

My observation falls mainly on this idea of *identity*. The problematic nature that emerges in this meeting is the personification of professionalism (Bartley, 2021). It is apparent from the outset in introductions through to conduct. The members who have absorbed 'professionalism' have annexed an alternative identity that carries distinct values, dispositions, and aspirations to the individual's non-professional identity (Bartley, 2021). As I sit looking at the different modes of being, I cannot help but think 'how' they are when the lights are off, and the director shouts 'cut.'

Questions circle as I ponder on why we do things the way we do. Do we get more done as we button up and sit upright and go through agenda bullet points that discourage informal conversations? And how about creativity? Surely the end goal of any gathering is a coming together where we bring our own infusion of ideas and perspectives to a wider purpose? Or have we, somewhere along the line, mimicked an archaic European Anglo-Saxon structure to establish rank and trade? (Sizer, 1996).

I need to stress that the discussions are nothing short of complex and worthwhile matters that concern the lives of communities. The members discuss the manoeuvring of rigid intergovernmental organisations and strategies to take their work forward. However, the conversations are shaped by care.

Care is the human glue that holds together families, communities, and societies. Care offers an alternative story of how we live and who we are. But it is being silenced and diminished in value, in the United States and around the world, sacrificed on the altar of economy and efficiency, demanding more and more of families and health care professionals with few and fewer resources, and threatening to displace meaning in health care. The moral language of humane experience, of people's suffering and healing – the bedrock of our common existence – is being stifled, and at worst will be lost (Kleinman, 2020, p.4).

This idea of care continues to cloud my mind as I find greater familiarity within the network, and I scribble it on my notebook and circle it with my pen. The individual identity as opposed to the collective evokes a formality. Still, this formality does not contribute to any of the discussions in any significant manner. On the contrary, the group meeting is perhaps lacking greater cohesion due to this front. This takes me onto the arguments posed by Illich (1977), who discusses the political fictions of care in a service-driven industry fervently. "Since love is not a political issue, care is not a policy question and service becomes the one business that is an unlimited, unquestionable and a non-political 'good.'" (Illich et al., 1977. p.72).

Through a feminist psychological lens, the discussion around competition among females born and raised in industrial male-dominated societies is argued to be driven by

social mechanisms rather than biological imperatives that prevent a cohesive female unity. This is a similar argument to that made by Karl Marx of 'false consciousness' (Shpancer, 2014). In this analysis, the work of Freire (1972) and the dehumanisation of both the oppressed and oppressor is an important theoretical framework for looking at the power structures in virtual communities. The critique of the patriarchal capitalist system is important and applicable to the power dynamics of virtual communities. In this, the awareness by which the different members operate needs to be considered. In a deeper analysis of sporting corporate backgrounds, which in plain sight can be shrugged off as rudimentary, a question emerges as I contemplate how much of women's identity has been hijacked by the system.

As Western women continue to plunge themselves onto the corporate ladder to pursue equality, I can't help but question whether a sense of our identity has been traded in for professional identity? The Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist, Ancient African, and Ancient Mayan philosophies draw heavily on living with awareness and equanimity from physical and psychological perspectives. The rat race that we force ourselves into regardless if the cage is made of gold, is nonetheless the Western version of the *Samsara wheel* – it represents the cycle of birth and rebirth and existence (M, 2017; Watts, 1987). As the observations continue, this divide, or power imbalance descends to the health and wellbeing of women and the discourse of empowerment. The feminism expressed in the virtual community addresses the patriarchal nature of the humanitarian system, and the host manoeuvres the power dynamics of the members by ensuring equal participation. Although the monitoring is mainly done by conducting checks and balances, I continue to wonder whether the Western counterparts have noted that the divide runs deep beyond rich and poor and into aspects of inclusion and humbleness.

I sink into my chair as the meeting unwinds and members begin to say their goodbyes. Some members mentioned how much they have missed these get-togethers as they smile into their camera, waving enthusiastically. I too, join in the frantic waving and feel I have been part of something that savours of a wholesome feminist sisterhood that was estranged to me before this day. Finally, I sit back as my screen reminds me that the

session has ended. It takes me a while to readjust myself and absorb the dynamics of the network. The observations move beyond the content discussion, and I realise that what makes a virtual community is not the assistance or participation of the members but how the members participate. Similarly, to how you would understand family dynamics, these different sessions and working teams have their own rhythmic structures.

7.4 Belonging to a Virtual Community

The meeting sessions continue to unfold, and I am no longer an estranged member who needs introducing. Nevertheless, there is still a glee when I receive the invites to the various meetings. It must come from feeling invited, accepted into a community that otherwise would be inaccessible. I can only compare it to the heavy queues in an establishment that you skip as you approach the front. The hosts turn to their boards and scroll down the list of names with precision until they stop at yours, smile, and let you in. I sit waiting for my cursor to transform its rotation into the vast expansion of the virtual community, flooding my screen with new and acquainted faces.

It is late in the afternoon, and I will be entering the first steering committee. I wonder how many of the old faces will be present in this meeting. This is the nucleus of the virtual community. Many of the important ideas and initiatives are discussed before sharing them with the other members and groups. My screen opens and I am finally let in. As I sit and re-join another session, which tends to be every few days or at a minimum once weekly, I observe how in a virtual community you are in two places at once. This is a striking element of digital ethnography. There is a mediated contact with the members which is facilitated by the internet. In the absence of the direct and sustained contact with people and their daily lives, virtual communities retain this element which is adapted in the incorporation of these gatherings. The members' everyday lives, the sharing of their lives in conversation, the screens that give windows into their spaces and environments are just as real as meetings in person (Pink et al., 2016).

The meetings all have in common a similar format. In a way, they follow a rhythmic pattern. The host interrupts the silence as she greets everyone who comes in: "Hi (name),

how are you?" A short pause penetrates the room as we all wait to hear back from the newest addition. The member unmutes, her background brings in a flurry of sound: "I am on the road" she explains, laughing mid-sentence as she sends greetings back. We all smile warmly. The host continues so not to waste too much time and gives a snappy overview of what is happening and final confirmations of the various activities. This meeting is run with a little more haste as some of the agenda topics seem pressing. The host scrutinises the virtual room looking for consensus to continue. This is emphasised as she methodically goes through each bullet point, pausing and saying: "Are there any questions, before we go on, and is everyone happy with this?" The long silent pauses are indicative of agreement, and finally we get to the good stuff: "And then we are going to talk about the (NETWORK) awards concept, an idea that we came up with. I don't know if we've mentioned it. I'm not sure if we mentioned' it before. We've talked about it in so many different places that I don't know where we have and where we haven't..."

"I don't think we have in the steering committee"...

"Ah, okay, so (Chair) and I were in a discussion one day about how people are given awards, and we don't know how they get chosen, and they are always very wealthy elites, they're always educated women, and we said, why don't we do an award for women, for frontline women, women at the frontline of humanitarian response." This invitation to explore an awards event for underrepresented women was an invaluable insight into the network's feminist approach. The idea was voiced by a member of the community that embodied an intergenerational leadership approach. Her voice did not flutter, nor did she attempt to *please* the other members or enter the discussion with niceties. Instead, in the absence of politeness, there was frankness. She quickly corrected her points and conveyed her ideas openly and confidently, much like a mother would when speaking to her children about a matter. This had an almost reeling effect, drawing you in closer. My gaze fixed on her image on my screen as she swiftly went through other network-related duties. You instantly knew that there was a depth of experience that ran deep through this member, also coinciding with the woman's age. She was a proud grandmother. I know this because she could not make the next meeting as she would be busy baking with her grandchildren.

Priorities, priorities; I wondered whether this frankness would also show in members who represented the INGOs mainly situated in the Global North. The kind of members that smile with a tinge of sympathy at the black and brown members who do not sport corporate logos. Although absent of any malice, I could observe the issue with failing to dismantle arrogance. From a pedagogical lens, it appears to be particularly intertwined with the stamp of approval that comes with the Western European education system. This notion of 'knowledge consumption' makes one tower over others, distorting our interactions as we profess knowledge onto others (Illich, 1978, 1970). Now, what is quite interesting in this network dynamic is that the notion of power, capitalism, and the colonialist legacy has left members with a bitter taste. As women, they come together with a shared experience of oppression, and although these experiences vary, they have shared a collective experience. This is where their strong feminist views come in as the gel that holds them together regardless of the nuances in power dynamics. Learning comes in the unification of this network as they create initiatives and push through with their research. The rallying together takes me momentarily to the Mexican seamstresses in the 1985 Mexico City earthquake. Women rallied together as their political consciousness was raised, demanding the legal right to organise and protect themselves as workers (Solnit, 2009, p.138).

Thus, what remains still adrift is a collective presence. In the absence of a deeper entrenched unity between its members, what surfaced is protocol. It feels stiff, like when you try on a new pair of shoes. Similarly, Kleinman (2017) argues that presence is an intertwined process of emotional and moral consequences relating to care. As I enter these virtual meetings, there is a visual force of presence and administrative imperative. This is the lack of solidarity between all members. As these women discuss and challenge the external societal hegemony of patriarchy and economic imperatives from an observant lens, the group needs to go through a reflective process and perhaps sit with difficult questions that go beyond the acknowledgement of power and privilege (Schipper, 2012). The meeting continued, and one of the INGO representatives' smiles, eagerly waiting intently for a volunteer. I have come to call this the dreaded silence: it is a two-fold dread. First, is the time factor, the long silence that sits between volunteering and someone unmuting. It

causes a peculiar discomfort visible on mainly Western INGO members' faces. It is on the verge of comical. The members sit there waiting for someone who is non-Western to unmute and say, "Yes, I'll do that." That would fit nicely into an equality quota, and with that, everything will be right again in their world. Or at least in their virtual world, this unspoilt space where things are done properly. In this virtual void of discomfort; one can see the flourishing of protocol emerge. So far, without fail, it has been felt the most by Western INGO members who break the silence. I feel tense as I imagine one part of the room exhale deeply, releasing the tension of those unbearable seconds. In their bid to curb the silence, they usually begin with: "I'm happy to do it if another member would like to join me?" Sometimes names are called out from the members from the Global South. As I watch the dynamics unfold, I am puzzled by the coolness of the others as they perceive discomfort in a different manner. Perhaps it is less to do with protocol and more of a question of availability and willingness without pressure to comply when virtual protocol is ruptured. This observation of managing discomfort leads me back to whether participation or the concept of *presence*, is what directs the members, or if it is a superficial engagement with equality.

Presence is a calling forward or a stepping toward the other. It is active. It is looking into someone's eyes, placing your hand in solidarity on their arm, speaking to them directly, and with authentic feeling. Presence is built out of listening intently, indicating that the person and their story matter, and explaining carefully so that you are understood (Kleinman, 2017, p.2466).

There remains an important link between presence and connectivity that from an ancient wisdom lens, the superficiality of equality as operationalised in modern Western society leaves behind: the humanity and interconnectedness which fosters creation.

Again, a disturbance comes, and again we have combination and creation. Inequality is the very basis of creation. At the same time the forces struggling to obtain equality are as much a necessity of creation as those which destroy it. Absolute equality, that which means a perfect balance of all the struggling forces in all the planes, can never be in this world. Before you attain that state, the world will have become quite unfit for any kind of life, and no one will be there (Vivekananda, 1989).

In this dialectical play, members from an individualistic and more collective approach are co-creating in these virtual spaces.

As the weeks roll by, the faces, voices and expressions of the virtual community members become familiar, and in that familiarity, there lies comfort. As the icon on my screen circulates, I trade in the hair patting for an enthusiastic smile. I hear the friendly voice from the host welcoming everyone. I reflect on a yearning that lingers at the start of meetings and during the end. Members greet one another as warmly as can be in virtual settings. It is a sign of our times and the technological advancements to have all these women gathered in one place at the same time and be physically removed from a shared location. Nevertheless, in the absence of physical presence, touch and expressed care are limited. The findings from the scoping review support these observations in the discussions around fostering friendships, support, and mentor style relationships, all of which are easier to do in person (Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013; Shah, 2011). Similarly, the restrictive structures that abound naturally with virtual settings restrain the flow of cohesion. There is a time-keeping that needs to be managed, and that impacts on this community's learning in a restrictive manner. In this hyperconnected modern world where some of us are plugged in constantly to some smart device, our ability to connect particularly in face-to-face conversations suffers. This is an added layer that is seeped into my observations. When discussing the issue of presence or deep involvement, each member's habits, social and economic factors are mixed in this cauldron of a space, and the ability of some members to engage in a deeper level and show high rates of connectedness and empathic concern can be attributed to their relationship with their dependency on technology (Johnson, 2018). In this virtual world, there is little room for a deep self-reflective process between the members (Freire, 1972).

As a woman myself, I reflect on entering this woman only feminist network. Now that I am familiar, and I feel a part of this community I cannot help but think about why women only spaces can be difficult terrains to manoeuvre. There is a competitiveness in certain female spaces that has left us with a bad name, particularly in the workplace. I am sure I am not the only one who has experienced the isolation from female bosses and

colleagues, who see you as competition. In competitive male-dominated spaces, there is only one seat for a woman, and that usually tends to be a white one (Bhopal, 2020). So in closer examination of this network's purpose, it has managed to lose the ferocity of corporate feminism which promotes toughness in the business world to pave the way for gender equality (Kral, Covarrubias and Iturribarría, 2012).

Members show solidarity with one another which outlines the operationalisation of their feminism. There is a relatively strong anticapitalism undercurrent which provides positionality to the conversations and maintains a balance in power so to speak. This 'other' feminism which departs from women's ascension to high corporate positions, is centered on social justice and spills through into all of the different committee meetings (Kral, Covarrubias and Iturribarría, 2012). What is more interesting is that there is a greater freedom displayed by members, who run the smaller NGOs and women's rights organisations, in their engagement with modern capitalist societies. The catch remains in the dependency for funds from these larger INGOs. Members of these organisations often explain: "Wearing my other hat" and they proceed as the INGO representative, and then: "Taking that hat off and wearing this hat," as the member of the community – so there is freedom in that aspect of not having to masquerade wearing all these different hats and being all these different people, but there remains the issue of funding. One of the unique aspects of this community in general is that the women dare to imagine a utopia and they mark their road regardless of their disjointed connection to reach a just society (Kral, Covarrubias and Iturribarría, 2012).

From an anarchist lens, the dispelling of female competitiveness for solidarity and collaboration strikes yet another chord with the work of Kropotkin (1902). In the many conversations where the women discuss the struggles of their communities, and others with a more global perspective, or even when they share their own situations, there is an evident 'mutual struggle.' This suggestion of 'mutual contest' allows for reflection about the role of civilisation and development. "Darwin's work had taken as scientific confirmation that life was essentially competitive, each pitted against each for survival. (A century before, Jean-

Jacques Rousseau had stood conventional belief on its head to argue that a decent original humanity had been corrupted by civilisation” (Solnit, 2009, p.88).

Solidarity is a strange thing; you can feel it growing as you appear more frequently on the other member’s screens. Like for example, when you begin to mouth your greetings and the members kindly point out that your mic is on mute. I smile and roll my eyes back, like to say, ‘oh silly me’, they welcome my clumsy nature with fondness. The tightknit fabric of this virtual community is made of the minuscule interactions that resemble elements of typical family gatherings. It takes me back to growing up in a household with many aunties, a strong mother and grandmother. As a child you run in and out of the kitchen where these women usually gather, lost in conversation they discuss the urgent matters of family. Only looking up when one of us children, are making too much noise, interrupting their train of thought. They turn and hiss at you, watching you sternly as you quietly scramble away from them and back to safety. Similarly, and I must admit, not to the same degree, there was an air about this tightknit virtual community that made me think to myself, ‘okay, you’ve been given permission to enter’. The internal dynamics of a community whose women have organised themselves deliberately as an organisation challenging a ‘Global North power and privilege’ by redistributing power to its Global South members emits a particular display of governance (Efange et al., 2022).

I frequently forget I’m sat alone in my makeshift office room slash older son’s bedroom. I log into one of our weekly meetings. As the cursor rotates it can look like revolving doors as you walk through to the main room. The governance of women folk from the Global South is something that I am familiar with. It is precisely this familiarity that prevents me from immediately picking up on the difference between how it feels to sit amongst what we refer to as our elders and being in a professional setting which is largely governed by seniority in profession or educational hierarchy. I’ve managed to become accustomed to both these settings, and both feel customary. It takes me a while before I can really put my finger on why I listen intently to some of these women with a different tilt to my head and humility. In other occasions when the conversation is driven by the members representing Global North INGOs, I find myself pressing my lips with crossed brows

instinctively prepared for the speaker to ask, 'would you like to add anything Claudia'. As the meeting comes to an end, I sit back in my oversized office chair sinking into my thoughts. Whenever these questions spring up like small city fountains disrupting the landscape from the mundane and routinized buildings, I realize a part of me does not want to come across as *unintelligent*. My desire to be a part of this community also comes with the anchor chains of legitimising my presence in and amongst the members. How I present this legitimization varies depending on the governance of the members and the drivers of the conversation.

Being in a room of only women, has a particular feel to it especially if I'm to compare it with regular university meetings at the Department of Health Sciences. The interactions rarely venture beyond administrative and collegial encounters. What makes the virtual community different is the feeling of solidarity that oozes from these women. Even though the activities that take place have both that administrative and collegial undertones, the gathering of women with a deliberate collaborative approach in the inclusion of local women's rights organisations as equal members are actions of defiance (Sophie et al., 2022). The political activism and the call to decolonise the humanitarian sector from a policy perspective is enshrouded within a large and abstract process. The UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) defines the meaning of localisation as, the enablement of meaningful engagement and leadership between local and national actors within humanitarianism that increases capacity and direct funding (Peace direct, 2022). Following this similar vein to establishing a more local peacebuilding and local humanitarian response, the impetuosity around localisation refers to a sense of 'initiatives owned by people in their local context' (Peace Direct, 2022, p. 2). It is precisely this collective spirit that marks the difference between a community and a routinised business meeting.

The women gathered in this virtual community are all stakeholders and owners of initiatives immersed in their local context with some degree of variations. In the case of members representing Global North Organisations, these members are by proxy firmly attached to a community that ropes them into a discussion of local. In this back and forth, reciprocating to, and sharing of each other's local contexts they discuss the internal

workings of a system that is cumbersome. All members unite as they continue to influence the decolonialising movement that plays out like the beat of a steady drum in all our meetings (Peace direct, 2022). Before I became a member to the virtual community my mind was more concerned with the actions of women that grab media attention. The uproar of feminist movements that rise like waves and engulf institutions like the film industry in Hollywood with the #MeToo Movement. But as I observed, what became apparent was the resistance of the community lay in small actions unnoticed by the mainstream as well as in the Global North. One must be part of the internal workings of any group to observe and understand the everyday actions of resistance. (Scott, 1985). The mere action of connecting and being present and involved with such a community is an act of defiance against a mainstream international humanitarian system that from inception has excluded communities and women as equal partners. As the women gather round in the virtual space, we feel like we are all sitting around a big table. All our backgrounds merge and the busyness of microphones coming on and cameras turning off mimic elements of women's physical gatherings as some walk to the bathroom and others grab a pot of something to pour. I don't feel yet I have an equal say as a participant of this community. My positionality of researcher and observer are more complex. As a young member of my family particularly in my early twenties I remember being the topic of many conversations. It is not openly discussed, but when you become the topic which is in many ways code for worry, you are not invited into the circle of trust. With a slip of the tongue, you find out about gatherings, but more importantly, ones you are not a part of. Coming from that collective background there is little to no privacy. Your individual choices are taken on as familial issues. Like with everything there are issues, and it becomes problematic when as individuals the option to fail and learn needs to happen without scrutiny and judgement. It is difficult to pinpoint the moment when this began to change. Many of us do not make it into the circle of trust. In my case, it was a slow and integral process. It required a show of evidence that you can manage effectively, and, in their judgement, you are going in the right path.

7.5 The Ritualistic Nature of Communities

Women have largely retained rituals that guide them through womanhood and are closely intertwined with health and wellbeing practices (Kimmerer, 2020). In rural West Mexico the indigenous women after giving birth bury the umbilical cord planting it underneath a tree on their land to symbolise the belonging of their child within their community (Korn, 2014). The ritualistic nature of the virtual community is also influenced by the plethora of rituals that culminate the lives of its members. There are many undertones that add to the flow of governance within this collaborative approach, and this is evident in the intergenerational leadership displayed by some of the members. There is an interesting duality within the virtual community that merges at times and compliments the experiential nature of empowerment. In many ways the intergenerational leadership and wisdom from some of the members who share a more collective background is like the tall and imposing trees of a forest. These trees are majestic. They stand protective, firm and are the refuge of many animals. The weakness with a collective and intergenerational leadership is the lack of space they offer other younger trees (Kimmerer, 2020). In the sturdiness of these old forests, at the root level the sun can only penetrate between small gaps. This becomes difficult for the young trees to flourish by themselves and are relegated to the shadows.

Similarly, the feminist humanitarian movement is largely occupied by veteran practitioners and representatives of INGOs and local NGOs. The lack of a younger generation represented within this community can be argued as reflective of a community that needs to make way for that younger generation and the innovation that comes with others who are new to the sector. Although there are strengths that come with a community that has so many seasoned leaders, there is a lack of reciprocity (Kimmerer, 2020). The various members are expert humanitarians, they know who is in each major organisation. 'Ah, you need to speak with so and so' they say calmly. It is almost as if they have an invisible rolodex as they go through names, organisations and more importantly decision makers. Many of these women have been pioneers and pushed through the alien concept of a feminist humanitarian system. Us younger women can feel some solace under their magnificent wings. They all have incredible bios. They are founders, researchers, and

activists. When they speak, I feel that awe that creeps up like a soft fuzzy feeling as they garner great authority. What is then missing in a room full of experience is the ability to make mistakes, the desire and optimism of when you are new to a task and feel charged with the injustices that are new to you. Hands without callouses work in a different manner. There is a greater appreciation for the small wins. As I sit back, and watch the dynamics unfold I think about what it would feel like for younger feminists to join in and give their opinions. Would they be listened to with the same intensity? Or would there be an internal rolling of the eyes from those that understand the system because in many ways they too have now become the system. In many ways, I am that younger inexperienced feminist humanitarian and I feel that experience is a pre-requisite to be fully welcomed into the circle of trust. The issue of integration and to contribute is that the community is not organised in a way that gives space for intentional brainstorming initiatives, but rather the sessions follow a *to do* agenda. Within this format the everyday resistance is equally important but, it has also become the weakness of the virtual community. The tribalistic nature of these gatherings, which is a positive quality, resemble dynamics that resist change. A recommendation regarding this observation is a need for a deliberate intention of the community's inner workings to create learning spaces. Such learning spaces may benefit a move away from dependency, including experience, rank, and professionalism. Learning spaces embody creativity and a stance where members are equal partners. The framework proposed in this thesis (please see page 413) could be applicable and adapted to facilitate a co-creation of knowledge. This being essential for solutions and approaches that impact on the health and wellbeing for women folk and communities that these organisations work with. From the outset our tendencies to become embroiled in what we perceive as our identities emerges. In addition, such identities become more cemented each time we present ourselves as representatives of organisations. The more we adopt a largely formal manner of interaction, human connection, familiarity, and care, dwindles in the background (Ryser, 1997). There are members that despite being representatives of large organisations and institutions present themselves as 'individuals', disregarding their rank and engaging as women and feminists. In this non-corporate Western feminist approach, the members that

have consciously avoided their jobs getting in the way of their personal opinions exercise a greater degree of critical thought (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, 2019).

As the debate continues swirling across our virtual screens, a contentious issue arises about funding structures from INGOs and the many bureaucratic realities that this virtual community is subjected to. One of the members, with a bashful demeanour begins by awkwardly apologising for her INGO. As the conversation continued, I couldn't help but begin to feel unsettled as I recalled her rose coloured cheeks turn a little brighter. She clearly felt responsible. From a feminist perspective and that contrary to corporate Western feminism, her opinions and contribution to the discussion was limited particularly as she was mindful not betray her organisation. In many ways, what she really felt about the situation was masqueraded behind professionalism. Some of the more interesting questions as this back and forth continued, made me ponder about the grasp of such institutions on women. How do we understand freedom beyond jobs? The conversation felt like a swift rise of highwalls. In what could be best described as an adaptation of the game Minecraft Pro, the larger the institution the greater the bureaucracy and limitation to reflect critically. These are the silent barriers that the community needs to be aware of. The discussion around how to create spaces which permit a true feminist co-creating network to work past rigid patriarchal structure are necessary (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, 2019).

The community dynamics take place on many different intersections, such as age, geography, race, economics, politics, and cultural aspects intrinsic to the experience of these women (Hankivsky Olena, 2014). There is a vibrant dance that happens separate to what is being discussed. As the final discussion points draws to a close, one member from a human rights organisation in West Africa interjects. She is excited to update the members on an ongoing funding issue she has been dealing with. Her soft West African accent travels through the speakers of my laptop. I move in closer as it's the first really interesting personal account that has sprung from this meeting. She speaks to us as if we are all in the room sitting around her. 'Thank you to our Chair', she begins, 'I could not believe it' she states, her thanks include the almighty God that protects her. She goes on to tell the members that if it were not for this community, she would never of had the courage to turn

down a reduced donation by a large INGO despite them going back on their word for an outreach programme. I quickly scan the neat tiles on my screen to see whether there are any reactions to the members comments. Just as I had imagined I see some of the members that work for these INGOs shake their heads in support with an expression that tells me, this sort of behaviour is all too familiar. The members all turn on their microphones and the discussion turn into a 'well done' and 'that's exactly what needs to be done'. This meeting has highlighted the important aspect of solidarity, friendship, and mentorship. All the tiles display pleased faces as she continues with her story. She excitedly dramatizes the conversation she had with the donor committee. Her hands gesticulating as she claps. 'There is power in numbers', she says; it was not that long ago that this human rights group would dip into their own pockets and fund their outreach programmes despite the West's abstract discussions on localisation (Peace Direct, 2022).

A huge benefit of this virtual community and its structure is that there is a miniature representation of the industry. The harsh realities that the individual members experience, including those part of the formal mainstream system is perhaps more susceptible to frustrations. In many ways the intention to join this virtual community is a form of resistance. members from this virtual community as expressed in countless meetings feel that there is a support provided. The members reconvene and what unfolds is an absorption of this experience as that of the entire community. The explicit power relations are laid bare in this account (Peace Direct, 2022). The members conclude that their work both as individual organisations and as a collective is not to be bartered with. Implicitly what the members continue to demonstrate is a form of activism as they in miniscule interactions are non-complicit, rebellious, and 'ungrateful' to the patriarchal system that holds the purse strings (Scott, 1985). In that, and contrary to my initial ideas about what a revolutionary virtual community approach entailed, the revolt of this virtual community has been a constant defiance that tackles issues as simple as establishing fair pay, and the refusal of accepting whatever is given. Charity in this case or 'philanthrocapitalism' as argued by Shiva and Shiva (2019) excludes the frontline responders that includes the affected communities and local workers as equal partners.

7.6 The Institutionalisation of the Humanitarian System

From a health and wellbeing lens many of the women representing local human rights and humanitarian organisations are also members of affected communities. When Covid-19 surged and affected these communities these women sprang into action. There is a tangible connection that links education to health, and there is no escaping it. The institutionalisation of the humanitarian system has concealed this link (Jayawickrama, 2018). The members of the virtual community have not been appointed by external organisations, rather they have seen a need to help their communities and have volunteered rather than await to be saved. In this lies their empowerment. Just as they have by their own volition become members of this community, they do not expect for doors to be opened for them. There is a strong sense of citizenship that infiltrates the internal dynamics of this group. This community is its members, and its members are the community. In the same manner the virtual community has not become an entity by mandate but has arisen from a need to penetrate an institution that operates much like a booming industry (Jayawickrama, 2018). Thus, all members have refused to be branded as vulnerable.

Continuing with the thread of authority and power relations, what strikes me is the different power dynamics from the members. The power and authority that comes from professional settings is in many ways gained. This can happen through educational attainment, promotion, rank, economic superiority, geographical location, and prestige of institution, to name a few. One can view these as rubber stamps of approval. Whilst there is merit in these accreditations, there are differences when observing generational leadership and how members that embody more of the lived experience of challenges and hardship present their ideas. In this observation there is no judgement placed on either. What is largely apparent is generational leadership is earned, it cannot be given, or obtained through external activities. I can feel at times like I'm standing at the mouth of a stream as it divides into parallel paths.

Meetings between women and in particularly those that are older who carry a wealth of experience are never dreary. The conversation on this occasion focused on memberships. They discuss with fervour the different requirements for future members and the importance of a Global South Led community. One member lowers her head, drops her glasses so they sit on the tip of her nose, and scrutinises a fee requirement with her mere eyes. She speaks openly. It is this frankness that distinguishes those professional settings that are governed by protocol and a collective approach. Discussions that impact policy address the importance of localisation and the need for a feminist agenda within the humanitarian sector. It is in the everyday and common interactions that such changes, regardless of how miniscule can have a greater longevity than abstract intellectual speeches. The frankness witnessed in this member is an example of the everyday feminism and resistance that make part of a push back against a colonial patriarchal industry that claims to serve the beneficiaries of mainly people from the Global South. There was something particularly kind-hearted about this member. You could feel her conviction, and that she understood, not from a policy perspective, but from experience that fees would deter certain applicants to join. As discussed previously, the virtual community and its chair have from the beginning upheld principles of inclusivity. In the same manner this member was ensuring that future participants representatives of local women's rights groups would not be outpriced or burdened. This shows that the members practice care that sustain the policy decisions of the community.

Before I joined the group, I had imagined a more militant approach to their feminism. The reality has been quite the opposite. The discussion of feminism within the humanitarian sector starts with miniscule actions, some as unassuming as pausing the conversation and establishing a free entry to members that are indispensable to the virtual community. As argued by the anthropologist James C. Scott (1985), the everyday actions of resistance are found in the foot dragging and evasion, the shortcuts taken and sloppiness when the masters gaze is turned away. The disgruntle that can multiply into many thousand-fold actions has joined these women into creating a community with shared

values. The feminist values that underpin this community together lie in a belief that together they are influential.

In many ways the everyday resistance that I have become accustomed to witness and recognise as actions of defiance are to me like breadcrumbs that expose the solidification of this virtual community. I was recently invited to attend a working group. The working group comprises of fewer members, and from what I can decipher, this group make an important part of the wider community. The session starts much like every other session. The chair in her upbeat and friendly demeanour waves and enquires after everyone, finding out about their week and how lock-down is treating them. After the niceties have gone on for a while and we are all connected, I expect a more formal approach to the meeting. This doesn't happen in the way that I was expecting. The chair smiles and tactfully reclaims everyone's attention. 'There are a few things that I wanted to discuss in today's meeting', she says. It is quite apparent that she doesn't want to influence the members. 'It is about speaking opportunities'. Everyone gives a knowing nod. By now, I'm quite aware that this is something I haven't picked up on. Another member interjects, taking some of the pressure of the chair to discuss what is a contentious topic by the look on everyone else. 'I totally agree with the chair' she goes on to say with a deep Australian accent; 'the speaking opportunities are not just for members from the Global North'. Like in any family, there will always be contentious issues that arise. One can analyse the matter at hand, but what is more striking is there needs to be a level of closeness and interaction that moves beyond logistics and administrative matters for members to openly discuss on how they want their community to run. Many of us are used to virtual meeting and discussions online, with some of these meetings running regularly. A missing component is ownership. As I continue to listen to the members I quickly scribble down on my notebook and circle 'ownership'. The members feel that this is their virtual community and as owners they can create, shift, and steer the ship in whatever directions they see fit. It so happens that on this occasion the issue at hand is about ensuring that speaking opportunities are available and encouraged to members that would usually not volunteer. The member continues, 'it's difficult' she exclaims, 'how do you bring up privilege?'. From the conversation I understand that when

opportunities arise which require members to present or speak at conferences under the banner of the virtual community there are a few that happily volunteer and fail to recognise their privileged position. This issue takes me back to my previous observation on professionalism and intergenerational leadership. The market-place rewards competition. Those that get there first are the ones that get the job, the promotion or the salary rise – either way, the marketplace does not condone co-learning approaches, or those that take a back seat to support others. Here is to another tricky issue, how does a virtual community reconcile its marketplace identity and its collective identity? On one hand, the virtual community like any other organisation is dependent upon the funding of large INGOs so that it can sustain its operations. Due to its set up, the virtual community is governed by principles of feminism, compassion, and care which at times its positionality can seem contradictory.

An important distinction that I have observed is that rather than a market orientated network, it is community led. And although it operates within the marketplace, profit or visibility are not distinguishing factors. Rather, the discussions are on impact and collective agreement. As my observations and participation come to an end, I feel that the members became used to my presence. Reflecting upon my experience made me think on whether I would want to be part of such a community and if its existence made an impact in relation to the health and wellbeing of affected people. Without such a community the many women's rights organisation that are already poorly funded and have little support, advice and guidance from across the spectrum would be adversely affected. That is not to say that such organisations could not go on, but rather in the feminist sense, the union of women becomes essential to penetrate such spaces. The health and wellbeing of the members themselves benefit from a community that has strong ties of care. On a few occasions members showed signs of relief that they were able to share their challenges. The needs of their organisations that are representatives of their communities were discussed as an imperative of the whole community. The funding that many of these organisations needed was funnelled through. The virtual community positioned them as the first responders. What is clear, is regardless of the virtual community, these women members are able to

mobilise and respond to emergencies on their own. Thus, it is not because of the organisation but rather, the fact that such a space exists is testament to the determination, resistance, and perseverance of feminism to create spaces that gather women with the same sentiment. I ponder on a couple of questions, one being, if the community grew much more, would it be as effective? And is the size a determining factor to maintaining feminist values? I think like with most things, if the virtual community grew exponentially, the community might want to look at how it conducts its meetings and whether it would implement smaller committees to avoid losing the close-knit element that you get as soon as you enter its warm virtual doors. Regarding the second question, the foundation of this virtual community is firmly grounded on an inclusive feminism that envelops its members with a sense of solidarity. There is a gravitation to belong and from my observation and participation these members share a common sense of belonging that transcends geography, race, culture, religion and language.

7.6.1 Mutual Aid

The concept of mutual aid runs through the theoretical and practical approach of this virtual community. Many of the local organisations are underfunded but work tirelessly with their local community. The importance of localisation is showcased by the Cuban Humanitarian Model. Cuba has incorporated a prevention mechanism and a disaster education, early-warning system, and emergency communication, instituted by the government, coupled with organised mutual aid society, as a valuable case study for Western developed capitalist societies to learn from (Castro and Ramonet, 2009). An important question is whether the representatives of INGOs are learning from a more localised approach, and how much of that co-learning is being absorbed to transform power relations? The Cuban success story with their Covid-19 vaccination programme, door to door testing and medical care goes beyond Western governmental leadership (Augustin, 2022; France 24, 2020). Similarly, one of the community members discussed her door-to-door approach as they combed through the village discussing the importance of hygiene to curb the spread of Covid-19. The basis of Cuban's ability to deal with uncertainty and danger lies deep in the social fabric of this small communist state. Cuba's mutual aid society is the

operationalisation of care and responsibility towards each other. The Cubans have neighbourhood committees (the neighbourhood Committees for the Defence of the Revolution – CDR) that snap into action without waiting for governmental direction or mandates. The CDR, in times of hurricanes that threaten Cuba, ensures that everyone, including pets and livestock, is moved to safety (Solnit, 2009). The success of mutual aid can be best appreciated through numbers; Cubans have evacuated 2,615,000 people to safety in the Ida hurricane with only four deaths (Solnit, 2009). Texas in the USA during hurricane Rita, tried to evacuate a million people and reported more than 100 deaths during the evacuation (Solnit, 2009). Economically, the US is far superior; what emerges from these two distinct case studies is the commoditisation of citizenship. As argued by David Choquehuanca, the vice president of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our Americas (ALBA), the culture of commodities turned people into consumers, eroding the idea of the human. Choquehuanca discusses *Qhapag ñan* – the path of the good life as a concept to revive the modern understanding of the human. This concept is not based on consumerism and owners but *iyambae* – a person without an owner (Tricontinental, 2018). As Bolivia embraces this socialist mass movement, what is striking is the resistance against modernity, through the carving of a civil society relevant to the people in Bolivia. The wider implication to mutual aid societies is their impact on the delivery of humanitarian aid. Cuba, through its universal literacy programme, has deployed Cuban doctors to over 40 countries (Castro and Ramonet, 2009). The Cuban humanitarian model is grounded on mutual aid rather than a politicisation of aid; an example of this is the free medical treatment given to over 25,000 Chernobyl victims, mainly children from Ukraine, as an act of internationalist working-class solidarity (Landersen, 2021; Castro and Ramonet, 2009). In contrast with (for example) Europe or the US, which has positioned foreign aid as an extension of foreign policy (Jayawickrama, 2018). The aid described by Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin (1842 – 1921), a prominent Russian anarchist and historian, was mutual aid. With the help of other Kropotkinism concepts, this would formalise the idea that mutual aid is a foundation to community and society, that it is, in fact, a biological law (Solnit, 2009; Kropotkin, 1902).

Mutual aid means that every participant is both giver and recipient in acts of care that bind them together, as distinct from the one-way street of charity.

In this sense it is reciprocity, a network of people cooperating to meet each other's wants and share each other's wealth (Solnit, 2009, 86).

Similarly, Kerala, the southwest state of India with a left-wing political party in power, has been hailed as a beacon in its response to Covid-19. Despite its challenges and low economic growth, Kerala's Health Department drew on its citizens, making them active participants in the fight against Covid-19. Eighteen committees were set up to work and deliver daily meetings and press conferences, imparting accountability, collaboration, and transparency (Prashad, 2020). The focus in this section is collectivism and its erosion under neoliberalism that is relevant to the philosophical undertones to the virtual community observed. The guise of democracy has been victoriously re-written in favour of countries that have placed more interest in war and money than the betterment of people. As discussed above, governments in favour of civil society and collectivism are broadly portrayed as authoritarian (Prashad, 2020). The passivity of Western citizens in the plight of the pandemic, in contrast with some non-Western efforts, depicts an endemic disablement of civil society. The case studies discussed showcase the empowerment led approach by the virtual community members that work directly with communities.

Furthermore, the pandemic was a further challenge for these virtual community members, but nonetheless they treated their respective communities as equal partners. The pandemic provides a world stage arena to evaluate the different responses. Whether one agrees or disagrees with a right or left-wing government, what lies at the heart of unsuccessful responses and successful ones is whether citizens have played an active role in responding and taking responsibility. To illustrate the commoditisation of citizenship to consumers, the Supreme Court in Britain threw out a legal challenge against the exorbitant fee charged by the Home Office to grant children citizenship. Such a judgement explicitly demonstrates that citizenship is a commodity, one that can be bought (Bulman, 2022).

Was there more to be expected from the "educated" West in handling a global pandemic? If the answer is yes, what makes us think that Western systems of global mainstream education, global health, and governance models founded on neoliberalism are

the only successful models that facilitate the empowerment of all? Such questions are applicable to this community. The leadership and collectivism are examples of collaborative networks. Through the unprecedented events of the global pandemic, there lies an invaluable opportunity to examine global responses that have deviated from what neoliberalism claims to be the only way. In exploring the 'others,' the marginalised communities, the rural women and girls who are free from the shackles of educational indoctrination offer an opportunity to explore a governance underpinned by the feminine principle (Shiva, 1999).

From an international legal lens, The WHO Constitution (1948) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) were the first legal frameworks to enshrine health as a fundamental right of every human being. Under international human rights law, this right extends beyond healthcare (WHO, 2022). Many hundreds of thousands of people have died as a result of the handling of the pandemic by the elite, mainly 'educated,' scientists and politicians (Davies, 2022). Data compiled by Johns Hopkins University reports the US death toll from Covid-19 as of February hit 900,000 people (Associated Press, 2022). As a contained virus, without global comparisons, little can be argued about the US breaking international law or upholding health as a fundamental human right. Greater China, with a population of 1.402 billion (2020), has reported 5,700 deaths (Statista, 2022). Therefore, the data around the global pandemic raises questions on the usefulness of the educated, and the link between the education system and its implication on individuals' health and wellbeing. Regardless of the various political affiliations, this section looks at the empowerment element to education and its impact on health and wellbeing. The role of leadership that has resulted in facilitating empowerment through active citizen participation and responsibility shows that people self-organise and mobilise in times of uncertainty and danger (Bump et al., 2021; Kaweenuttayanon et al., 2021). What emerges here are two positions, one of individualism and that of collectivism as described in the Letters of Vivekananda:

The history of the world shows that those who never thought of their 'little' individuality were the greatest benefactors of the human race, and that the more men and women think of themselves, the less are they able to do for others (ViveKavani, 2020).

This section strives to learn from the very ones, Western society wishes to save from the brink of poverty and vulnerability. It argues that poverty is not merely the absence of commodities, but real poverty lies in the absence of self-governance and creative expression to shape and imagine alternative futures (Brown and Samuel, 2013; Illich, 1978, 1973, 1970; Illich et al., 1977). It is precisely these two states of individualism and collectivism that breeds power imbalance as observed in the virtual community.

7.7 Emerging Points / Themes

1. Presence.
2. Feminism as inclusive and solidarity.
3. Differences between women (Global North and Global South) – a certain level of analysis.
4. Empowerment.
5. Responsibilities.
6. Priorities.

7.8 Conclusion

In the observation of the virtual community and the different committees and member wide sessions, lie a group of female members that are well organised. The virtual community is almost comparable to scheduled trains. Within this group lies an infinite network of dynamics that give cohesion to each gathering, creating what I have come to know as a community. The daily running's of the network are of little use in understanding how the members interact and the omissions which bind everything. Although the members speak in English and are all women, they bring a rich and diverse background as they work for a common goal. The nuances in communication patterns, tones, and awkward silences became visible the more I engaged. As an observer, I maintained a certain distance and

participated when asked to. I was able to be fully immersed in the different group sessions and to learn to listen, not necessarily at what was being said but how it was being said.

The overall research question for the second research method process examines “What is the experience of empowerment through education?” In this, there is a plethora of experience of empowerment through education. The findings and analysis centres around community and how this community is forged between members. The coming together and sharing of common goals, working on projects and discussing strategies is a highly charged and varied experience of empowerment that takes place through learning (Abidin and de Seta, 2020; Pink et al., 2016). The educational aspect of the virtual community comes in a more subtle manner. The observation discusses a need for greater retrospection or a space that ought to be created to allow for a deeper *presence* to occur amongst members (Kleinman, 2017). In these conscious safe learning spaces, which were missing from my period of observation, greater cohesion and empowerment could be achieved by working around some of the digital barriers present (Shah, 2011).

There is a continuous learning that takes place, both implicitly and explicitly. The background of the members makes up the learning landscape that takes form in social justice and humanitarian work issues. The deep-seated pockets of concentration that flow between the members and are exacerbated with intergenerational leadership pre-set precisely the experience of empowerment through education. Each member learns from one another. Regardless of whether it appears so, the knowledge from members mainly in the Global North (as they guide the rest of the network through the formality or policy implication, or requirements for manoeuvring the various INGOs and the clunky humanitarian system to ensure their network is allocated funding) supports an essential part of the network’s professional progress. Furthermore, the different aspects of connections displayed, like the pockets of conversations that take place before the agenda kicks off, the sharing and bonding between members, the spontaneous kind words about ‘missing one another’ and it being ‘too long since their last meeting’ are also part of an undetectable learning. This obscure learning in the form of bonding and caring is what fuels

the members to conjure up ideas for events and research, and makes part of the 'other feminism' that they operationalise (Kral, Covarrubias and Iturribarría, 2012).

As a result of the busy schedules and agendas, which are intensified by the virtual nature of the community, more focus could be placed on creating open spaces to mitigate hierarchal structures and restrictive meetings to enhance the education aspect of the virtual community.

To conclude, there is a stark differentiation between virtual meetings over Zoom, and a virtual community. The differences lie in the continuity of interactions as a meeting place where members create and forge friendships through common goals (Barratt and Maddox, 2016; Pink et al., 2016). Being accepted and involved within a tight-knit community of women of any form leaves you with a connection. It is there that the community aspect of these virtual gatherings is formed. The profundity of these observations and the peeling away of protocol and agendas leaves bare the inherent need for connection, collaboration, and authenticity in the way we present ourselves. Presence and deep involvement as concepts continues to emerge as defining characteristics of empowerment (Kleinman, 2020, 2017; Solnit, 2009).

8 Findings and Analysis: Key Stakeholder Engagement

Karma is the natural basis of all existence. It is not a law that is imposed from above. It does not allow us to outsource our responsibility anywhere else; it does not allow us to blame our parents, our teachers, our countries, our politicians, our gods, or our fates. It makes each one of us squarely responsible for our own destinies and, above all, the nature of our experience of life.

(Sadhguru, 2021, p.8)

8.1 Introduction

The key stakeholder engagement was completed through a two-part in-depth qualitative semi-structured interview (Please see Appendix F). The aim of this third research method process is the critical examination of the varied experiences with education and its impact on the health and wellbeing from the lived experience of the key stakeholders. The key stakeholders in this research method experienced varying degrees of uneven development, crisis, poverty, and discrimination. The two-stage process engagement examines the personal journey to empowerment through learning and their professional engagement with policy and practice regarding empowerment, education, health and wellbeing. Drawing from the gap in the literature regarding informal, indigenous wisdom and knowledge in formal and non-formal educational settings as per the scoping review findings (Chapter 4), the learning experience of the key stakeholders is a critical focus in this method (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2019; Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013; Wiggins, 2012; Shah, 2011). From this premise, the key stakeholder engagement data informs the current literature on development, empowerment, education, and wellbeing, from the lived experiences of women from different geographical, economic, social, political, educational, religious, and cultural perspectives (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2019; Raj et al., 2019; Seeberg, 2014). Therefore, this chapters findings and analysis strengthen the scoping review and narrative literature review findings irrespective of the different complex contexts of the key stakeholders. The underlying common themes that explicitly and implicitly make-up the

learning that has culminated into facilitating a deep-rooted self-governance, propelling these key stakeholders into making meaningful life choices and positively impacting their health and wellbeing are teased out.

The findings and analysis of this chapter acknowledge the capabilities of the key stakeholders through their trajectory from girls to women, beyond the current vulnerability paradigm (Shiva, 1999; Kleinman, 1995; Rodney, 1972). The findings examine the learning derived from suffering, misery, and austerity, which is largely unacknowledged by Western normative frameworks that govern research, policy, and practice (Sennett, 2008; Illich, 1978, 1970; Illich et al., 1977). The findings further capture the experience of freedom of choice in girls and women within their journeys of empowerment — bringing forward a new perspective that challenges the paternalism of empowerment. Thereby challenging the mainstream operationalisation in policy and practice, and Western feminist ideals on what constitutes an empowered woman (Butler, 2020; Struckmann, 2018; Foulds, 2014; Nussbaum, 2000; Shiva, 1999).

8.2 Background

The plethora of literature on women's and girls' empowerment from a marginalised and rural context regarding education, health, and wellbeing mainly examines the vulnerable settings and oppressive structures that limit access to mainstream education and health services. The literature emphasises on particular social groups and the limited participation in the market economy (Delprato, Akyeampong and Dunne, 2017; de la Rocha and Escobar Latapi, 2016; Perryman and de los Arcos, 2016; Dincer, Kaushal, and Grossman, 2014; Hill et al., 2012; Jayaweera, 1997). However, Buddhist theory exposes a gap in Western sociological approaches that fail to address the nature of suffering (Radhakrishnana, 1950). The exploration of a direct and embodied understanding to discover insights into the possibilities of freedom are internal processes overlooked by the tendency to only focus on the external (Schipper, 2012, p.208). The findings and analysis of the key stakeholder engagement are a result of deep involvement in their anthropological narratives and social histories (Kleinman, 1995). Through thematic analysis, this chapter

discusses the dialectical play between suffering and self-governance. In this, determination, resistance and adaptability are examined without anaesthetising the discomfort of self-reflection. This chapter further argues it is through an independent co-arising of joy and suffering that learning and commonalities emerge from (Schipper, 2012; Watts, 1987). As argued by Watts (1987, p.30):

For the greater part of human activity is designed to make permanent those experiences and joys which are only lovable because they are changing. Music is a delight because of its rhythm and flow. Yet the moment you arrest the flow and prolong a note or chord beyond its time, the rhythm is destroyed. Because life is likewise a flowing process, change and death are its necessary parts. To work for their exclusion is to work against life.

The delicately woven threads of freedom and choice that flow through these ethnographies would be otherwise missed if measured against a standard metric and linear projection of progress (Kleinman, 1995; Vivekananda, 1989). From this standpoint, the empowerment of the key stakeholders in many ways fail to meet the Western ideal of empowerment because of the harsh experiences that would otherwise categorise these women as vulnerable. The notion of arrogance are tensions explored in this chapter particularly as women's empowerment has been trampled on by Western constructs (Chapter 2). In many ways this chapter allows for a non-colonial women-led narrative to unfold that discusses empowerment within a collective-based approach rather than a constrictive individualist identification (Shiva, 1999).

The key stakeholder engagements involved 10 women born and living in Africa, the Middle East, South America, South Asia, East Asia, and the UK. The age range was between the ages of 30 and 60 years old and more than half of the key stakeholders are married, including a same-sex marriage. Regarding dependents, some of the key stakeholders have children, and grandchildren, with a small minority single and with no children. Their religious and spiritual affiliations range from Christianity to Islam, Hinduism, different variations of Buddhism, and indigenous influences and non-religious affiliations. All the key stakeholders in different points in their lives experienced marginalisation, poverty, discrimination, rurality, conflict and disaster. The key stakeholders have a range of

educational experiences, with all of them having accessed higher formal education from bachelor's degrees through to doctorates. In addition, the key stakeholders hold positions of leadership, representing NGOs and INGOs, universities, non-governmental agencies, national a health service, and act as independent therapists and contractors. All the key stakeholders are members to a range of communities, from refugee camps to indigenous groups, women's professional and non-formal networks, religious communities, and non-formal educational affiliations where they teach. From this broad overview their backgrounds depict women that are diverse, mature, compassionate, humble, and strong.

Although the key stakeholders have experienced hardship there are also aspects of privilege that are equally important. The discussion around empowerment is understood as multidimensional and this is largely due to the absence of homogeneity among the participants. The findings show that the key stakeholder identities are not strictly collective or individualistic. Nevertheless, a fundamental grounding of collectiveness in all their identities emerge which unites them despite their differences. From a yogic perspective, these two broad human volitions are implicit in their ability to forge deep connections with people from different cultural, and economic backgrounds, demonstrating compassion. The key stakeholders did not display judgements or discrimination towards uneducated, rural, or marginalised populations. On the contrary, care, solidarity and compassion were defining sentiments. A main topics of conversation was on the value of traditional knowledge, the learning that comes from suffering and misery and the acuteness of arrogance and ignorance displayed by mainly white Western colleagues and Eurocentric institutions that fail to develop equal partnerships with affected people. Despite the care and compassion the key stakeholders are shrewd and forthright in their opinions and decision-making, which outlines another tension within this chapter. As argued by Sadhguru (2021, p.31):

Unfortunately, people's identification with narrow notions of individuality makes them engage with the world selectively rather than inclusively. The endless oscillation between like and dislike, attraction, and aversion, further hardens their sense of separateness.

The idea of inclusivity and totality is embedded in these narratives. There is no separation between pain and joy when recalling their experiences as a displaced child fleeing the war in Iraq, adapting to poverty or escaping the Syrian war as an adult, with others living through years of civil war, experiencing disruption to their education. There is no resentment or bitterness, no lingering suffering or identification as helpless victims. The key stakeholders have full ownership of their experiences and this comes through in their reflective process. Their actions in the face of uncertainty are the *freedom* element to the empowerment discourse, that is rarely captured. As argued by Shiva (1999), development projects in “third world” countries are an existential legacy to colonialism and Western patriarchy.

Development was to have been a post-colonial project, a choice for accepting a model of progress in which the entire world remade itself based on the model of the colonising modern West, without having to undergo the subjugation and exploitation that colonialism entailed (Shiva, 1999, p.1).

The findings in this chapter challenge the commercialisation of women’s empowerment (Foulds, 2014). Ultimately a choice can be facilitated, but it cannot be made. One of the questions which emerged from the findings and analysis is, are we ready to engage deeply with women’s empowerment? and in particular women from non-western societies? It is no longer a question of whether empowerment exists.

Despite the different religious and spiritual affiliations present, the key stakeholders also manage different degrees of religiousness. Christian key stakeholders were amongst the most devout and came largely from Africa. Their religion played an important role in their upbringing and community. The church and religious women’s groups played an important part in their lives. The experience of suffering and overcoming adversity was intertwined with their faith as they expressed gratitude to God and drew strength, protection from the Christian faith. God was positioned as a guardian and beacon, with prayer and church worship as important support structures (Edwards et al., 2013). However, another key stakeholder that grew up in a Catholic country in South America, experienced the church for most of her youth and young adult life rejected this religion. Her church

experience was exclusionary. Her decision to reject the Catholicism instigated her critical thinking, leading her to leave the church after experiencing divorce. The key stakeholder felt there was no support for women who wanted to exert full control over their lives.

Nevertheless, the church offered a community and deep friendships with other youths. She recounts as they would gather every Sunday and play for the church band, defying the strict gender stereotypes rife in the church. This vibrant group of friends united in solidarity with their common experience of poverty, marginalisation, and social injustice, which she missed during her years in formal education. Class played such a divisive role as she was growing up. Schooling and community learning allowed her to understand her fight for liberation and became aware of the oppression in society. As argued by Freire (1972, p.36):

The pedagogy of the oppressed, which is the pedagogy of people engaged in the fight for their own liberation, has its roots here. And those who recognise, or begin to recognise, themselves as oppressed must be among the developers of this pedagogy. No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption.

Turning her back on the church facilitated a reckoning with herself that led her to explore and carve her spirituality through herbal medicine, Buddhism, and indigenous practices. Again, her faith system, which is broad and inclusive, is linked to wellbeing, and influences her research and therapeutic consultations.

Similarly, but to a lesser degree, one of the Muslim key stakeholders discusses her religion and gender stereotypes critically. Fleeing the war in Syria and becoming displaced allowed her to rebuild a new life with her husband and children, gaining a level of physical and mental separation from her close-knit community. The traditional pressures that would otherwise have run much of their decision making was left behind allowing her to become an equal breadwinner. The way she manages her feminist, religious and cultural views demonstrate ownership. The freedom to reconcile what can be viewed as contradictory positions is a commonality between the key stakeholders that manage a more collective identity. In addition, another broad commonality between the key stakeholders is the ability

of letting go. All key stakeholders have been plunged into different situations. The exposure to other cultures and geographical locations have allowed them to re-discover themselves away from their communities and family. Through traveling they disposed of many preconceived notions trapped them. Whilst others, through boarding school, and moving away from family for long periods of time experienced a similar liberation process. Such experiences have brought about important aspects of determination, routine, and self-governance. Another example of letting go and concepts of re-creation and ownership resulted from a divorce, and similarly, moments of uncertainty produced vision and allowed the key stakeholders to reimagine alternative futures. As argued by Watts (1987, pp 24-25), the distinction between belief and faith can be used more broadly in areas beyond a religious and spiritual context. The key stakeholders engage with life through experiences of detachment;

To discover the ultimate Reality of life – the Absolute, the eternal, God – you must cease to try to grasp it in the forms of idols. These idols are not just crude images, such as the mental picture of God as an old gentleman on a golden throne. They are our beliefs, our cherished preconceptions of the truth, which block the unreserved openings of mind and heart to reality (Watts, 1987, p.24–25).

All the key stakeholders hold feminist ideals that are discussed both implicitly and explicitly throughout the engagement process. However, their lived experience is best analysed through an intersectional feminist lens. The many complex layers to their experience as women are not always understood as *freedom of choice* whilst using a normative white Western feminist lens (Kurtiş, Adams, and Estrada-Villalta, 2016). The tensions found in Western feminism on the commodification of caregiving are not tensions found in the feminism operationalised by the key stakeholders. In many ways their positionality is not conflicted because they are spouses, mothers, caregivers to their families and communities, or devout to their religion. The common thread in the experience of womanhood for women from the Global South with a collective background is further discussed in the Methodology Chapter (Page 119). Moreover, the key stakeholders display different levels of sacrifice and devotion which does not undermine their empowerment,

instead, their decision-making process and the multidimensionality of womanhood and empowerment is asserted. From a decolonial lens the work from (Nussbaum, 2000) – challenges the notion of Western feminism needing to *save* the oppressed woman of colour (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

The two-part interview on policy and practice also examines concepts of involvement and care in their work without major division or separation; again, this brings forwards the collectivism that underpins many of their decision-making (Nussbaum, 2000; Shiva, 1999; Watts, 1987). All key stakeholders share frustration with the bureaucratic nature, discrimination, inefficiency, and racism in their different organisations and non-governmental institutions. Through their various organisational structures, the key stakeholders show a deep level of reflection and awareness of the structures within which they operate. As argued by John McKnight (1977, p.74):

Removing the mask of love shows us the face of servicers who *need* income, and an economic system that *needs* growth. Within this framework, the client is less a person in need than a person who is needed.

The key stakeholders are seasoned professionals and can distinguish between *presence* and professionalism (Kleinman, 2020). The web spun by political fiction that uses care as a tool to create policies and industries to further the service of ideology also manipulates the service provider into thinking that what they do is ultimately helping or caring for others (Illich et al., 1977). All stakeholders are aware of this manipulation and express care through a deep involvement that lies beyond the margins of systems that impose bureaucracy, hierarchies, tick box systems, and discrimination, “because caregiving shines a light on human conditions as interpersonal” (Kleinman, 2020, p.238).

To conclude, the key stakeholders manage various elements of their lives beyond the structures and limitations that govern their workplace and complex social contexts. Self-governance has similarly been applied in different degrees throughout their most challenging moments in life. In this way, they have different degrees of intergenerational learning, community approach, and strong familial bonds.

8.3 Profiles of the Key Stakeholders

The key stakeholder engagements commenced in April 2021 until September 2021. These sessions have been continuous alongside the first and second methods. All the key stakeholders have gone through the necessary consent procedures, and are members of a range of virtual communities, and represent international NGOs, and non-governmental institutions and universities.

Table 8 outlines the characteristics including age, region, experience, and a broad professional description of the key stakeholders. The first of the participants is a South Asian woman. She is remarkably intelligent who experienced civil war in her youth and early adult years. Her mother and father, both journalists, gave her a largely independent upbringing, allowing her to gain responsibility and manage life without too many comforts. Although education was expected of her and she was bright, she recalls her need to seek approval in her early childhood years. As she grew up, the need for approval later shifted as she entered the workplace and experienced journalism. In the workplace, the only praise received was having her story published. These lived experiences led her to embark on a legal career and become a lawyer with a focus on gender issues. Her father gave her a love that remains until today. She talks about love as one of the most important lessons in her life, the unconditional love that she shares with her family. As she reflects on her early years, she acknowledges that she lacked some love from her mother but did not display feelings of resentment. On the contrary, she praises her mother for being strong and progressive despite their time. From a professional context, this South Asian woman, as outlined in Table 8, represents INGOs and NGOs but has also used her legal expertise to progress women's rights. An interesting element of her upbringing, is her strong socialist background, built on social justice. Through her commitment to teach English in non-formal community settings she engages with youth. Her community work enables her to operationalise care, provoking her students to envision alternative futures and work on a plan to get there. This key stakeholder shows maturity, wisdom, and humility as she relates her experiences candidly discussing the gaps in policy and empowerment in a formal education system and the failure to incorporate happiness, wellbeing, and confidence as part of the curriculum.

Table 8 Key stakeholder profiles.

Transcript code	Region	Religion	Personal settings	Age range	Experience	Formal education	Professional setting
<i>1.1.a – 1.1.b</i>	South Asian	Buddhist	Married with children	45-55	'Promotes women's equality in the field of law. Teaches English in non-formal settings. Has experience civil war as a young person.	PhD Lawyer MSc. In Women's studies	Director at an NGO relating to gender and justice programmes. Has represented international development agencies, and INGOs, and government bodies.
<i>1.2.a – 1.2.b</i>	Syrian Kurdish	Islam	Married with children	35-45	Experienced gender discrimination and cultural oppression. Has fled war and experienced displacement as an adult.	MSc in Humanitarian Studies	Represents an INGO based in Iraq with a focus on women's protection and empowerment issues. Her main work is country level, primarily Iraq.
<i>1.3.a – 1.3.b</i>	West African and British	Islam	Single	40-50	Attended boarding school from a young age away from family. Has experienced very demanding and senior roles in peacebuilding and conflict transformation.	PhD MSc in Development Studies	Independent adviser on peacebuilding and conflict transformation and has represented INGOs in West Africa.
<i>1.4.a – 1.4.b</i>	Middle Eastern	Islam	Single	30-40	Has fled the war as a child with her family. Experienced displacement and life as a child refugee School disruption. Has a comprehensive community approach regarding humanitarian aid.	Medical Doctor MSc in Humanitarian Studies	Represents a non-governmental organisation and oversees humanitarian operations in the Middle East and North Africa. Has experience in teaching humanitarian studies.
<i>1.5.a – 1.5.b</i>	East African	Christian	Married with children	35-45	Experienced a high degree of poverty and rurality. Death of mother at birth. Has experience with women's networks and teaching.	PhD MSc Hydrogeology	Lecturer and researcher at a university focused on Natural Sciences.

<i>1.6.a – 1.6.b</i>	East African	Christian	Married with children	30-40	Experiences poverty and rurality. Economic hardship. Has extensive community knowledge and has worked promoting educational grassroots initiatives preventing child marriage.	Bachelor's Degree in development studies	Represents an INGO primarily working on grassroots initiatives in Africa. Vast experience with community approaches and with empowerment programmes for young women.
<i>1.7.a – 1.7.b</i>	South American	Spiritual	Divorced, re-married, and with children	50-60	Experienced poverty and marginalisation. Economic hardship and single parent household. Has extensive experience working in communities and with indigenous groups. Merges medical herbalism and spirituality in both a professional and private capacity.	PhD MSc in Psychology	Currently on a post-doctoral research programme relating to health and high-stress contexts. Experience in psychometrics and therapy. Experience in teaching and lecturing.
<i>1.8.a – 1.8.b</i>	Black Southern African	Christian	Single with grandchildren	45-55	Experienced poverty and gender stereotypes. An experienced humanitarian, working globally. Has a strong Christian faith and community, now living in the UK.	MSc in Humanitarian Studies	An experienced humanitarian representing an INGO with a focus on education and girls' empowerment. Oversees a global cluster in her role as director.
<i>1.9.a – 1.9.b</i>	White British	Spiritual	Married	35-45	Experienced discrimination, and disability, and marginalisation. Has worked with youth and sex trafficked women. Has extensive experience in promoting equality issues and promoting the LGBTQI+ community, mainly in the UK	MSc in Humanitarian Studies	Equalities lead at a National Health Body. Has worked promoting equality and diversity programmes ranging from disability to sex and gender inclusion.
<i>1.10.a 1.10.b</i>	East Asian	Spiritual / Leaning towards Daoist and Buddhist practices	Married with Children	35-45	Experienced pressure in her formal education. Competition to perform and uphold family and societal ex.	PhD	Associate Professors at a university relating to Environmental Studies.

The second key stakeholder is a Syrian Kurdish woman, whose relation to empowerment provides an interesting dichotomy. As a Muslim woman, who was born and grew up in Syria, she experienced discrimination for being Kurdish. Her father was an important figure in her life, and she recounts her moments with him, describing him as the first feminist she knew. Now, a mother of two girls and having fled the civil war, she has embraced and created a new separate life with her husband, where her ability to work and provide for the household is not judged. She converted her experience of displacement and refugee status into a positive one through her determination to complete a MSc in humanitarian studies. Her lived experience is fused into her work as she represents an INGO and engages with compassion, understanding the various dynamics of culture and complex social settings for women and girls in the Middle East. During our engagement sessions, she displayed awareness, and strong feminist ideals that did not conflict with her views on marriage, motherhood, and religion. She also spoke of picking her battles and displayed respect for elders in her community. This engagement brings in the complexities of community and family bonds that have both positive and negative aspects, but within those dynamics, she has ownership of her life and her decision-making process. Her choice on whether to comply or not was presented as still very much her own decision. To submit or rebel came with an awareness. Her experience with formal education addresses the discriminative aspects of accreditation and its role in society, employment, and status.

The third of the key stakeholders is a dual national from West Africa who received a British education. Her experience with formal education, mainly boarding school, as shown in Table 8, needs further expanding as it does not fully capture some of her lived experiences and learning, which revolved around responsibility as freedom. However, the educational environment that privileged her in accreditation also taught her discipline, which she applies in her life. She highlights traditional African values that further embed lessons on respect, usefulness, and responsibility. In her PhD journey, she notes how useful these lessons were. Her role as a peacebuilding and conflict transformation adviser is a role close to her heart that draws on her strengths and dislike to conflict. Her

Vivencia –lived experience – as a dual national, has given her the foresight to be critical about aspects of her Western education. As a British alumna she discusses the arrogance she perceives in accreditation status that can impose a lack of respect for affected communities. The wealth of her informal and formal learning brings in the dichotomy of humility and arrogance as cornerstones to ineffectiveness in the humanitarian system.

The fourth key stakeholder profile was displaced as a child after fleeing war and emigrating to North Africa, where she grew up. Her circumstances bring issues of privilege and adaptability into play as her parents were well off and also had to adapt to displacement and a refugee status. What makes this key stakeholder engagement so paramount to the discussion is the adaptability and perseverance of her mother. The key stakeholder recounts her mother's approach in facing these challenges and the impact it has had on her learning. In addition, the key stakeholder shares an awareness regarding formal education as families affected by conflict, poverty, and rurality engage with formal education as a means to an end. The key stakeholder also shares similar views to other key stakeholders on Western arrogance and discusses at length the abstract notions of decolonisation, which rarely come from those who ought to be driving the conversations. Her approach to communities resonates strongly with all the key stakeholders who discuss the importance of really listening and being humble. Furthermore, her vast work experience as a humanitarian and representing several international NGOs and non-governmental organisations signals the fractures of systems that are devoid of care as they turn into industries. This engagement challenges the normative colonial frameworks and penetrates deep into hypocritical movements that philosophise on change but never relinquishing power.

The fifth key stakeholder is an East African woman that grew up in considerable poverty. Her experience was made harsher as she grew up motherless and with a stepmother that ushered her out of the family home to ensure provisions for her own children. This meant that her needs were overlooked, with her half-brothers and siblings being prioritised. As a result, she was sent to live with an aunty and was made to stay back from school to take care of the household

duties. The key stakeholder entered primary school at a later age than most children. Despite this age disadvantage her dedication was not amiss and the school recognised her abilities in the sciences. She obtained a scholarship to continue through and finish her secondary and A-level education. Coming from an illiterate family, her choice to persevere saw her re-engage with education as a working adult and finish her bachelor's degree in science. Although her dream of pursuing a medical degree did not materialise she continued working her way up and embarked on a master's degree abroad despite having small children. Her lived experience is rich with community engagements, and she has a strong reference to informal women's groups principled on the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* – I am because you are. She goes on to discuss the various community approaches and mechanisms in response to poverty and uneven development. Her engagement gives insight into gaps in policy and practice that fail to engage with marginalised and rural women. She is an admired member of her community and holds a strong Christian belief that emerges when discussing her empowerment journey.

The sixth key stakeholder has some comparable similarities with the fifth key stakeholder, as shown in Table 8. Her experience with formal education is similar, and her opportunity to gain a scholarship and enter a boarding school marked a beginning of her development and engagement in empowerment, leadership, and community initiatives. This key stakeholder represents an international NGO, whose organisation looks at power structures and transfers power to local staff. This key stakeholder approaches the family from a collective standpoint as she helps her siblings by paying school fees and training rather than pursuing her interest first. In this, the key stakeholder also demonstrates a choice in doing so. From an empowerment journey, there is again emphasis made on the importance of responsibility as freedom. Being useful and understanding the basics of taking care of your person from a practical perspective involves an emphasis on informal education and awareness of the role that a lack of comforts can play in learning.

The seventh of the key stakeholders is a mature woman that brings a great deal of sensitivity to the engagement sessions as she discusses her early life and the

choices she took from a young age regarding school. She was exposed to educational settings for privileged South Americans but nevertheless experienced discrimination and the divide within social classes. She discusses formal education from multiple lenses, as a former student, teacher, and academic. Her main topics revolve around the standardisation of education, and the curriculum that fails to harness creativity and depth. She also has a strong spiritual knowledge and has revisited her indigenous heritage, working closely with communities that are experts in their own right regarding herbal medicine. This key stakeholder further discusses the industrialisation of pain and illness and the invisibility imposed on marginalised people through arrogance and structural hierarchies.

The eighth key stakeholder is a black Southern African woman who now resides in the UK and is responsible for directing humanitarian programmes in various countries. The emphasis on her as a black woman is to mark the intersectionality of her lived experience (Hankivsky Olena, 2014). This key stakeholder has experienced gender stereotypes from society and family. However, these judgements did not deter her from pursuing a university degree and being the first female in her family to study a non-typically female subject. This key stakeholder brings an insightful reflection regarding marriage and the perceived notions of an educated woman being less likely to find a husband due to her earning potential and disruption to social norms. Her own experience and choices demonstrate her tenacity to move forward and create a life for herself. She also candidly speaks of her career's obstruction to her personal life and marriage without resentment. This key stakeholder is perhaps more formal in the engagement process and has more individualistic characteristics and professionalism in her mannerisms. In many ways this can also be interpreted as her need to survive and get ahead in formal systems. Her experiences in travelling the world have given her perspectives on the various degrees of female oppression in mainly Muslim countries as she makes subjective judgements about her own culture and stereotypes. She demonstrates zest for female liberation and equally has deep Christian beliefs that she refers to as she discusses her life experiences, strength, and determination.

The ninth key stakeholder is a white British woman who has experienced discrimination throughout her life in different degrees. This key stakeholder brings a wealth of insight into the frustrations with Western systems that govern our education, employment, and health systems. In addition, she discovers an interest in humanitarian issues and working with people by travelling and exposing herself to different cultures and settings. As a dyslexic woman, she has encountered judgement throughout her formal education, and in her initial journey to empowerment, she sets out to prove that she can make it. This focus is later turned inward as she becomes surer of herself and her capabilities. As a gay woman, she navigates a range of stigma and external pressures that also come with society at large. She speaks at length about the alternative and belonging to a closed and attached LGBTQI+ community that she has clung to because she felt accepted. The positive and negative aspects of her experience are further addressed through details of a sense of loss as she became estranged from society in many ways. As she carved a space for herself she began to take greater ownership of her life. She gained a better grasp of the direction she was heading and is now focused on her marriage and pursuing a PhD. Her professional insight into systems and bureaucracy is multi-layered as she discusses the negative effects on wellbeing. This key stakeholder is sensitive and shares both her strengths and sensitivity in the key stakeholder engagement process.

The tenth of the key stakeholders is a woman from East Asia married with a child. Her formal education and upbringing differ from the other key stakeholders in the pressure and competitiveness that is part of normal schooling. The country's political system is also comparably different, and empowerment, human rights, and individuality are not applicable in the same manner as in Western countries. However, within her complex social settings, she understands the need for a system and standardisation that would allow a country with such a big population to work. As she reflects on the fast pace and demands of her profession as an assistant professor, she values her family life. Empowerment as a concept is a Western term that she doesn't necessarily see in its mainstream form. She understands empowerment as a collective pursuit rather than an individualistic trait. Similarly,

the key stakeholder shares a sense of awareness and choice common among all the other key stakeholders.

8.4 Themes Emerged Through Thematic Analysis

The distinguishing characteristic of this chapter is the engagement process that looks beyond an interview exchange. In establishing an engagements, the author established a rapport with the key stakeholders. There was a sense of comfortability in our discussions and familiarity that emerged through dialogue (Silverwood, 2014). In the field of communication between women, chatter is an important tool. As we developed common ground, I was able to share my own experiences candidly and relate to similar shared feelings that surged from this ethnography. In many ways the bond of engagement could be described as a 'cohesive glue' (McAndrew, 2017). Although the engagements were guided by semi-structured questions full freedom was given to the exploration of different topics by the key stakeholders (Antelo, 2014; Silverwood, 2014). There were 28 engagements with 10 key stakeholders. The engagements involved an introduction meeting, an engagement on empowerment, and a final session on policy and practice based on their professional capacity.

The flexible approach to thematic analysis identified, analysed and reported patterns from within a rich data set (Braun and Clarke, 2008). Thus, different social contexts, as shown in Table 8, the thematic analysis of these engagements identified the commonalities and learning that makes part of the lives' of the key stakeholders (Boyatziz, 1998). Finally, the semi-structured nature of the interviews generated general guidance and structure through the engagement process. The emersion into the anthropological narratives of the key stakeholders also gave the flexibility to listen deeply and accommodate questioning more specific to their lived experiences, bringing a phenomenological lens to the ethnography (Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio, 2019).

The coding process established four main themes, as shown in Figure 32:

1. Systems

2. Societal Impact
3. Empowerment
4. Care

There were also 17 sub-themes and 36 codes. The semi-structured questions were constructed to answer the overall research question: Do educational experiences empower women from non-Western societies? There were also subsequent research questions and sub-questions pertaining to this third research method process.



Figure 32 Inductive thematic coding.

8.5 Research Questions and Sub-questions

How does education facilitate the empowerment of girls and women in relation to health and wellbeing, and the ability to make meaningful life choices?

Engagement Process A: personal accounts on the journey seeking empowerment through education:

1. Does mainstream education develop you to your fullest potential?
2. How did non-formal and informal education prepare you for life?
3. What learning approaches are the most empowering?

Engagement Process B: policy engagements on education through empowerment:

1. What changes are needed in our education system to facilitate the empowerment of women and girls from marginalised and rural backgrounds?
2. How can our education system be more inclusive?
3. How can our education system promote the health and wellbeing of girls and women?

To provide greater context to the thematic themes, sub-themes, and codes that emerged as outlined in Table 9, the themes, and sub-themes have a broad description in Table 9. Table 9 does not provide definitions to the terms below, but rather, the descriptions given to the terms come from the key stakeholders' own views and understanding. Likewise, the derivatives to these terms have been captured as sub-themes and codes also come from the key stakeholders' own elaborations on their meaning. In this sense, the themes, sub-themes, and codes have been generated inductively from the raw data, allowing for a data-driven thematic analysis process (Nowell et al., 2017).

Table 9 Theme and sub-theme explanations.

Theme	Sub-themes
<p>Systems The theme, systems, encompasses societal institutions, mainly the structure and systems within formal education, mainstream health services, and humanitarian systems.</p>	<p>Judgement The opinions and consequences that result in discrimination and disadvantage relating to hierarchal structures and subjective opinions.</p> <p>Bondage Situations that perpetuate restrictions and limitations contrary to one's wishes.</p> <p>Ignorance The false assumption of knowledge and inability to engage, listen, and learn from others. This applies to systems and people.</p> <p>Dishonesty Masking the truth or disguising inefficiency knowingly.</p> <p>Wellbeing Physical and psychological issues.</p>
<p>Societal Impact The theme on societal impact includes the external factors and stressors which make part of the key stakeholders' experiences and lived experiences. This ranges across cultural, political, religious, and societal norms and values, which are influential or relevant to the background of the key stakeholders' experience.</p>	<p>Challenges Struggles, problems, and experiences for which the key stakeholder has expended effort or made sacrifices to overcome.</p> <p>Awareness An understanding and knowledge about entering into a situation or understanding how to navigate a system.</p> <p>Imagined futures. A creative process where key stakeholders could create a reality not yet achieved.</p> <p>Freedom To be free from structural limitations or psychological restraints and limitations.</p> <p>Participation To play a part in society and communities.</p> <p>Technology Technological advances and influence on education and work.</p> <p>Mentoring and Poverty Having role models or listening to people who inspire and motivate you to achieve or embark on projects.</p>

Theme	Sub-themes
<p>Empowerment The theme discusses the key stakeholders' understanding of the term 'empowerment' and how they define it.</p>	<p>Self-governance To govern oneself internally and live consciously. To exert control over one's life and decision-making, showing independence, respect to oneself, and choice.</p>
<p>Care To show compassion, love, and kindness to others. These are also acts of love shown to you.</p>	<p>Community Support Informal networks and bonds that are created by engaging with different groups and people, which key stakeholders feel part of in some capacity.</p> <p>Deep Involvement To listen deeply and interact with respect and a sense of equality.</p> <p>Community Approach Initiatives and projects that involve communities and certain social groups. This could also be government initiatives aimed at certain communities.</p> <p>Humility To be rid of arrogance and display equal respect for everyone. To connect with people primarily through a shared sense of humanity.</p> <p>Family Bonds The link and love between family. This includes solidarity and support that the key stakeholders have found in the family and its members.</p> <p>Non-judgement To avoid discrimination and division by various categorisations or lack of categorisations.</p> <p>All aspects of care, love, and kindness that the key stakeholders have experienced and project.</p>

8.6 Findings and Analysis

The first of the themes, 'Systems,' described in Table 9, is an essential component of the key stakeholders' ethnography from a personal and professional capacity. Systems as a theme is found throughout the findings and analysis as all the data in different degrees discusses systems as restrictive. The defining boundaries to this theme refers mainly to institutions of education, health, humanitarianism and professional occupations, that are constant in the lives of the key stakeholders. For example, Key stakeholder **I.2.a** experienced education in Syria as a militarised operation, with its hierarchal structure: depending on the mark achieved, students were shifted into different sectors representing their place and value in society:

So, I think maybe I was. The whole structure in Syria... it was more of like schools were not something nice, it was very... more like military, like a lot of discipline. This is how everything in Syria was actually. It was all imposed by the Syrian regime at that time. For example, you have to only wear black socks; even your socks had to be a certain colour, even actually our uniform was. It looked more like military; it was a dark green, so it was more like military than a school, but still, I think...

This quote shows a severe end of the spectrum regarding hierarchal structures in an education setting, but nevertheless, the power to dictate people's roles in society is mirrored throughout the key stakeholder's experiences with mainstream education and the struggle to take back ownership. Referring to these systems as mainly restrictive, the data further points to examples of standardisation that discourage the individual flair intrinsic to humans. A broad summary of Illich's critique of formal education is the inability to cater for people's native curiosity and facilitate an expansion without the individual relinquishing power to the system. The restrictive nature of mainstream education is explained by a key stakeholder through an example of sports and academia. The arbitrary division between the two is based on the assumption that one cannot be good at both; this segregates and imposes judgement.

So, he was supposed to sit his final exams to go to another level, but this is someone who is also talented in games. He's talented in games, so he went on. I think there was a tournament in which he had to participate, somehow representing the country in that tournament. He was someone who was selected from the people, who like, had done well to represent there, but then, unfortunately, the timing clashed with the exams, so he ended up missing exams, and he was not considered... (I.6.b).

Through a policy and practice lens, key stakeholders discussed the inefficiency and bureaucracy found in systems:

...and that's because of the number of barriers they have in place with just too many people, too many! That organisation is just so big, I don't think they kind of planned it or organised it very well. Then everybody says that and nobody wants to fix it (I.9.b).

From an empowerment lens, the above extract highlights the disempowerment in rigid systems – collectively identifying a problem and refusing to address it reflects a systematic issue. The disablement to rigid systems takes an identity of its own rather than encouraging a collective approach to working together and co-creating (Illich et al., 1977). Reiterating this finding but from a different lived experience, the South American key stakeholder also expressed a coercion to operate in the various systems that govern modern societies. No longer is this about Western societies versus the Global South, on the contrary the data shows the same frustrations are present with any high consumption consumer economy. Despite consumer economies rooted in Western colonialism, the proliferation of industrial systems is as much a part of Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East as in Western societies. The disabling of people and communities through the continuous growth of service economies is perpetual as long as everyone continues to believe services are needed and are inherently good for people (Illich et al., 1977, p.76).

It is difficult because we are inserted into a system, a very, very closed system, in the Western side of the world. I think we are included in that. I think that Covid could bring some knowledge about it. Maybe we could... I think every difficult, every terrifying

moment in our lives, we can acknowledge the pain, but we can also acknowledge the resilience and the wisdom that the moment brings us. So I hope that things change, that things change now, because of the experience of needing to stay at home more, more than we were used to in the past (I.7.b).

From a health and wellbeing aspect, the experience of working in a highly bureaucratic and hierarchal system is not only disempowering (Page and Czuba, 1999; Illich, 1978, 1973; Illich et al., 1977), but also negatively affects health and wellbeing:

I would say, growing up, I remember having panic attacks during my learning in school, actually. I was doing very well, so I was getting great marks, but, I was still, I mean, struggling a lot, I grew up not having any confidence in myself actually, which thinking about it, I was doing very well, I shouldn't have that (I.2.b).

The following examines a shortcoming in mainstream education by the absence of a deep-rooted social capital approach within formal education:

I think the whole education system in terms of its expectations and the stresses it places on children to excel has to change for the wellbeing approaches to be more proactive. I think still the emphasis is far more on academic excellence or excellence in education, so that the wellbeing aspect gets a little lost. So, it's only when it becomes desperate that it becomes an issue that is generally talked about (I.1.b).

I think university more teaches you the discipline to just keep going, and then you have to succeed, you know, just survive whatever you need to survive so that you can get the A, get the approval from the boss, you know, which doesn't really work for everybody, and talking about wellbeing it usually goes against that when you take that attitude (I.3.a).

Well, I suppose it's really quite interesting because I think at the time I definitely didn't like school and I think that I struggled a lot with education partly because it wasn't until I was in university that I discovered I had dyslexia. So, I went through school kind of feeling that every time I tried, it wasn't good enough (I.9.a).

This extract supports the overall positioning of this thesis to the disconnect between mainstream education and health and wellbeing. Although much has been

researched regarding the link between formal education and the positive health implication for girls and women, research conducted has failed to critically examine the pedagogical approaches that empower students (Stark, 2018; Paddison, 2017; Mwaiko, 2017; Hampton, 2010; Tuwor and Sossou, 2008; Bush, 2000). In discussing the positive health aspects to formal education and girls, child marriage was an important topic that emerged in one of the engagements. The South African key stakeholder highlighted the disconnect between policy and practice and implicitly addressed some of the deeper issues giving insight into the 'why' child marriage persists despite an increase in school enrolment figures.

And I think you have seen over the years the number of girls who have been abducted, the number of schools that have been destroyed, the people who are being killed, just for saying we don't want girls to go to school. And that will continue in some of those contexts maybe because it's linked to some particular ideology or some kind of terrorist agenda, and even at a global level, you can't tackle some of those issues. So, what I do think is that when it comes to these national kinds of challenges... – I'll give the example of Zimbabwe and what the government is trying to do at the moment. They are working with the members of parliament... they are working with the political parties to really take the message to these religious groups that are practising this, because what tends to happen is, yes, we tend to target a lot of our messages to women and explain to a lot of mothers, groups, women's groups, to keep their girls in schools. But ultimately, the one who makes the decision about a girl's future is probably a man, and possibly the father or a brother. So, we need to make sure that these messages are being given to men as well, not just to women. Also, in some of these communities, it's not just about awareness and education. I think it needs to go beyond that and also be integrated into the laws, because in a country like Zimbabwe, where these religious groups have been doing this for years, (I don't know how many arrests have been made), it is illegal to marry a child. But actually, we don't yet see application of the law. We see more and more that young girls are getting pregnant and giving birth, some of them actually dying in childbirth. So actually, what is happening even on the legal side needs attention: we need to see more arrests. People need to see that it is actually a crime to marry a child at that age: an adult must have consented to getting married. So actually, it's child abuse, its sexual abuse, it's all the violations that you can imagine against a child. So, it's all those things where children have been robbed of their ability just to be children, and their basic human rights (1.8.b).

The above extract supports the argument presented by Nussbaum (2000, pp.29-30) when discussing policies addressing women's situation in India, including child marriage and child labour: she argues that the simple enactment of policy does not create change. The gap identified by the key stakeholder in interview I.8.b relates to enforcement issues, and whilst the intentions may be good, the practice element to policy is an *engagement* issues with communities - and there lies one of the most crucial findings in this third stage of the research process.

Women face many other obstacles to acquiring fully equal citizenship. Child marriage, although illegal, is a very common reality, especially in some regions, where it is traditional. Laws against it are not enforced, and it pervasively shapes the trajectory of a girl's life (Nussbaum, 2000, p.29).

When examining gaps in policy and practice in greater detail, the theme of *deep involvement*, (which encompasses listening and respect) is intrinsic to the involvement with local issues. The ethnography unravels the dynamic role of women in their personal and professional journeys. The issues around policy framed within the current vulnerability paradigm is that it misses the opportunity to harness women's agency: policy and practice that have a local understanding are required rather than the abstractionism which is displayed in the empowerment, decolonisation, and resilience discourse (Kleinman, 2020; Solnit, 2009; Shiva, 1999). The finer dynamics of resistance go unnoticed in the midst of restrictive systems. An extract from key stakeholder I.2.b in her second interview on policy and practice implicitly addressed the challenges in representing an INGO removed from community knowledge and the nuanced power dynamics:

Do you find that the mothers have authority or power in the sense of having influence and enacting change, or what is your understanding about that? (M.)

Well, yeah, I mean honestly, in general, we know in this context, and obviously, in many places around the world, women have less authority inside the houses, and it's the man who is the final decision-maker. But we could try to work with him and see who can influence... the father, if it is not the mother, who else can influence

the father's decision, so it is this sort of thing... so if it is not the mother, the mother would know who could change his mind, for example (I.2.b).

A further characteristic of systems was the frustration felt in operating through its rigidify:

The system is so dysfunctional in so many ways, that ah, you know, when you really get into it, like how funding cycles work, how you do assessments for projects, you know, the timings; it makes it so hard to then do what we are talking about, which is respect people's learning and knowledge and, even, understand yourself or how you are listening to it because it's like, can you get in and do some sort of full anthropological study in two weeks instead of two years? So, you know, it's something about the way the system functions that is quite problematic (I.3.b).

The findings and analysis of the data have exposed the frustration and illusion of care within caring professions (Kleinman, 2020). The patterns reported from within the data emphasises on important characteristics about what systems represent and the link between health and wellbeing (Braun and Clarke, 2008). As shown in Figure 33, *systems* is the most coded and represents a large section of the key stakeholders' experiences; following suit, a blend of themes represent the co-arising elements of challenges and overcoming, empowerment and bondage (Schipper, 2012; Watts, 1987).

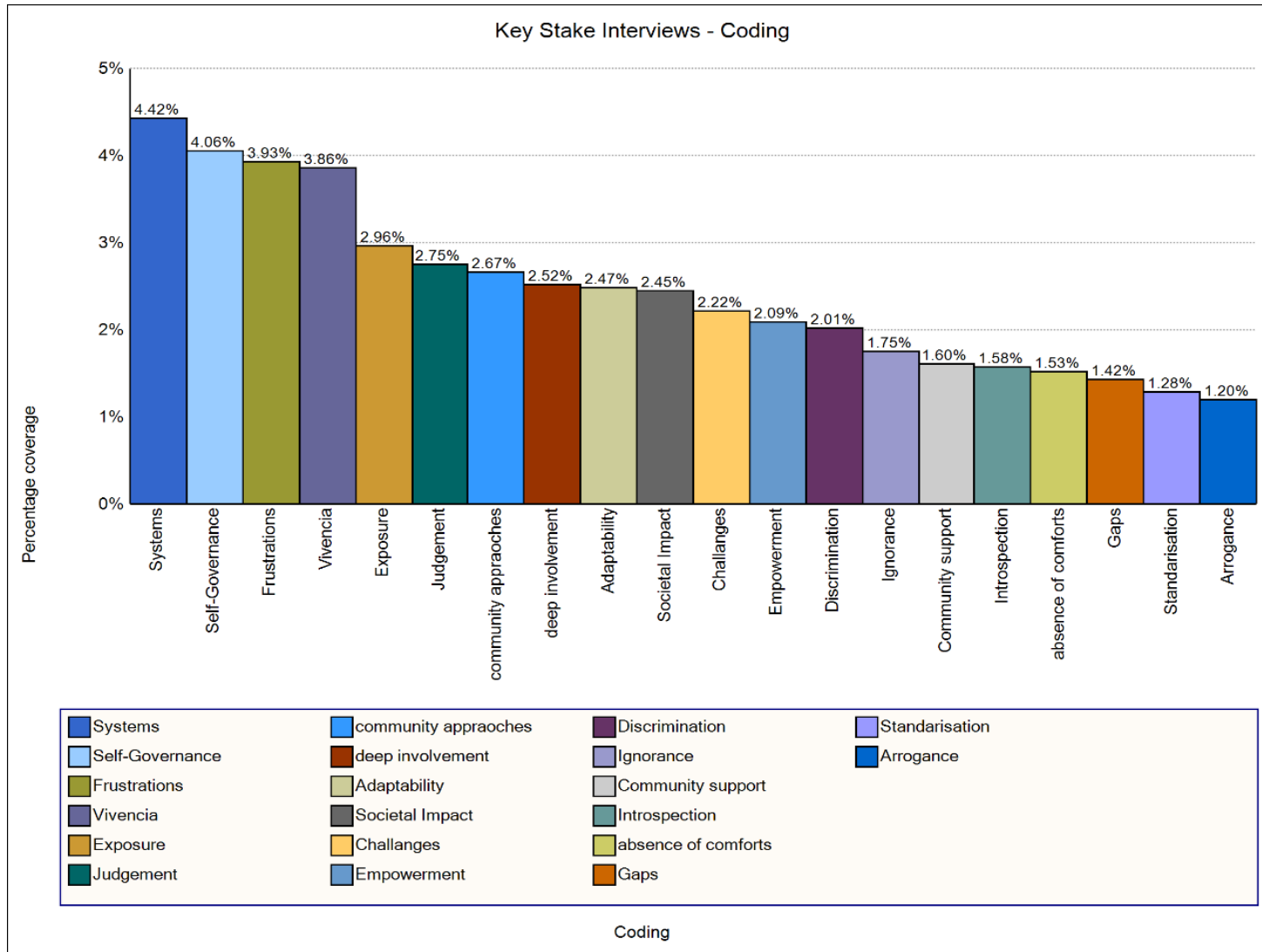


Figure 33 Key stakeholder interview codes.

An important sub-theme to systems is 'judgement,' firmly underpinning the analysis within a health and wellbeing context. What this sub-theme examines is the negative division made by educational institutions deeming some educated and others uneducated:

I think that was a challenge from day one we were born. Just having a Kurdish name could mean I am being discriminated against automatically (I.2.a).

I grew up in a small town, in the west of (Britain) and I think it was the sort of area where there was definitely a class system, of, you know, working class, upper class, and it was if you were seen to be working in a poorer area, then you would automatically, it felt at the time as though you were automatically put into the lower classes rather than being given the chance to progress. And even though I was someone who really wanted to work hard, I wasn't acknowledged for that. I think that there was this sort of tendency to... I really have analysed this because I think it felt almost as though there was a shadow around me that people didn't actually see who I was trying to be, and it just sort of put me into the lower classes of everything. And then it wasn't until I got to secondary school, that I felt I should try to shed the skin [impression] the teachers had of me (I.9.a).

And I think also one important part is the implicit bias that we have, and I would say that works with gender and nationality, assuming that if someone is from Syria, then she is not smart enough to do the job, whereas someone from the US is like okay; they are ticking that box and if it's a man, he is smarter than the woman, and that affects getting opportunities obviously and even education. I feel like right now women are getting more because more institutions are putting the criteria; okay women are encouraged, or they will have a portion of women to receive the scholarship to meet a target. That's why women are getting better opportunities. It doesn't mean that they are getting equal opportunities, but it means their chances are increased a bit, but I feel that we need to be [active] in policies, in general, but also as people, and implicit biases are not something that you can recognise easily. I mean we tend to think that someone foreign is smarter than someone who is a national here, who hasn't been abroad. And that can affect a lot of opportunities but also a lot of challenges being a leader and having a leadership role in any location or in any organisation, for example, but if you are a female, you will have more challenges, you will have more struggles. Everyone will question you more, and if you make a mistake, you will be punished more (I.2.b).

A key analysis that emerges is the discrimination found internally as a volition argued in ancient philosophical wisdoms like Hinduism and Buddhism that offer technologies like yoga, meditation, and mindfulness to re-engineer these unhealthy patterns of being (Sadhguru, 2021; M, 2012; Henning, 2002). Division, in essence, becomes a central characteristic of systems, underpinning illness (Sadhguru, 2021). In addition, division can be traced from the different educational experiences that most women from non-Western societies experience:

Well, from a formal perspective, I just feel it was difficult as an African to always be learning American history or British history right or European history right, so that from a formal perspective, it seems like it was not so relevant to my history. You know what I mean, we are all connected, so European history touches on African history, but I have to go to university to learn that. Whereas maybe if I was at... if I had a less international education, maybe I would have had more African history, if I went to certain schools. So, I found that not so useful (I.3.a).

What I mean is that, for instance, I remember many incidents when I had European staff or expatriate staff, and they were thinking that people were not [intelligent], starting from the premise that people don't shake hands, don't have smartphones, don't have Facebook, don't understand what social media is, have never seen a movie in colour, and with this ignorant and stupid perspective, when they took management decisions or decisions regarding mechanisms, they would explain in a very naive way as though dealing with a population with much lower IQ. Having suffered a crisis doesn't mean that they are ignorant (I.4.b).

What we learn from this last extract is the rife judgement that is happening continuously, reflecting the impulse that dominates decision-making and the importance of a pedagogy of reflection. People are judged by the speed of technology, by what they wear or how they sound, which references to a society dependent upon comforts. From an austerity lens, the dependency on external comforts, like technology, and overdeveloped systems and machinery has dimmed our ability to connect through our humanity rather than just intellect (Sennett, 2008; Illich et al., 1977; Illich, 1973). This extract explicitly points to the ignorance upheld by arrogance and judgement. The more inclusive our identity remains, the greater our ability to connect with one another (Sadhguru, 2021; Ngomane, 2019;

Zulu, 2018). The enveloping nature of the key stakeholders' engagement with systems has further elicited bondage as a sub-theme. Bondage is also related to some cultural systems and gender stereotypes – there is no differentiation in professional systems or cultural systems; if grounded in rigidity, the result is enslavement:

Lack of being, because you can't just fully be you, and I have, I would like to say, I am lucky to have learnt very early the value of emotional and mental wellbeing. This is a whole other thing that I have forgotten to talk about. But my professional life started early on to give me sometimes a sort of anxiety, which I relate again to the formal education not [having] set me up to work. And when I say to work, not to achieve the professional part of work, but to handle the social aspect of work. And so, I found myself, with some, I had this throbbing in my throat, which was physical, only to learn later on that it was anxiety, so it was about my mental wellbeing. I didn't even know that it was possible that you could be stressed in your head, and then it had this physical manifestation. So, talking about a life lesson from very early on, when I was aware of that in my career, I have always sorted out like alternative health and mental wellbeing without maybe calling it that. I gave it a lot of attention. So, I think not being able to work or feeling like being restricted, or you have all these pressures put on you to perform, *that* for me is being disempowered. So now as a consultant, the way I work is very empowering. I have confidence in my knowledge (I.3.a).

A critique of the development discourse assumes that a Western-style of progress is the right course for non-Western women to emulate (Shiva, 1999). This fiction is the basis of the frustrations captured in the data. The discussions around economic empowerment have been a major focus for international organisations like the UN and the "Gender Development Index," which measures empowerment through specific issues like the gap in economic participation, earned income, and decision-making in the public sphere (Jayaweera, 1997). From a health and wellbeing lens, empowerment enabled to above key stakeholder to regain control over her career and relieve the pressure as a consultant that allowed her to address the health implications that came with systems of bondage (Illich et al., 1977). From a Hindu and Buddhist lens, this is *Samsara* – the protracted delusion of the

mind/the cycle of birth, death and rebirth (Sadhguru, 2021, p.250), and in a more Western term, the “rat race” (Watts, 1987). At the core of the key stakeholder engagement, the findings show the inextricable connections between self-governance, empowerment, and wellbeing.

Well, we have a medicine industry here that is very interested in pain and disease; this is a fact, and there is an industry around pain, a very big industry around pain everywhere, and even an industry around disaster (I.7.b).

The above poignant extract unmasks, through the participant’s journey of empowerment, the fiction of care in health care professions (Kleinman, 2020, 1995; Lindekens and Jayawickrama, 2019; Illich et al., 1977). Her extract also indirectly applies to the commercialisation and acquisition of women’s agency (Shiva, 1999; Illich et al., 1977). In the analysis of this extract, the key stakeholders demonstrate an awareness or a ‘knowing’ regarding the structures that engulf them personally and professionally.

The second theme is the societal impact are hard experiences with the external world, including the challenges experienced, the lessons learnt, and how the key stakeholders dealt with and adapted to those external issues. This is the awareness element to their societal participation and engagement with education:

Now having worked in Syria, like at the borders and seeing a lot of families, and reflecting on what she did, I don’t know how she was that resilient. I didn’t understand until today, and then, how you make things simple as a child and maybe she did not know all the fancy words of mental health and social integration and this and that, and maybe she had this wisdom and knowledge that maybe comes with disasters and that I don’t think they teach in schools. I think there is some sort of knowledge that is not explicit that comes with misery (I.4.a).

The implicit survival or knowledge (above quote) is discussed by one of the Middle Eastern key stakeholders when reflecting on her mother’s ability to adapt after fleeing the war in Iraq and living as refugees. She recognises that in her ability to manage, there was a conscious decision-making process referred to as wisdom

and knowledge that emerges from misery. Her reflection offers insight into a largely unexamined aspect of the innate capacity in people who face disaster. Solnit (2009, p.10) argues that the word 'emergency' comes from the verb 'to emerge,' and relates to new opportunities to rise differently, describing it as a disruption to the expected. She captures in her work a rebirth, and although recognising the calamity and devastation that people face, looks beyond vulnerability paradigms, recognising affected people as first responders and the breadth of community learning and care that surfaces. Similarly, the key stakeholders express this dichotomy of opportunity or austerity as a positive in the face of uncertainty.

I think, I don't know if I am so confident. But a little bit more than I was for sure. I think when I separated from my husband, I had to be. I divorced because... we were married, we stayed 11 years together, I think that gave me bravery. I don't know... because I had two kids alone and I had to take care of them, alone, in this house and, so maybe that would be the starting point for that. Maybe, I don't know (I.7.a).

When I was at work there were people who were also not comfortable with what they were doing, and of course they were trying, and of course I used the same encouragement, the same experience we went through, and I am where I am now (I.5.a).

That he doesn't have to go through some of the difficult times that we did, but strangely so we had the period of the insurrection, which made us really mature in our early twenties (I.1.a).

In the multiplicity of the ethnographies, the theme of *challenges, positive austerity* and the *absence of comforts* are interlinked, providing rich thematic patterns of the learning that emerges as intergenerational wisdom. Moreover, in highly publicised research, following the September 11 terrorist attack in New York, women in the vicinity of the attacks who developed post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) found their babies at nine months had significantly lower cortisol levels than babies of healthy mothers. Through a Hindu lens, this may be understood best as a karmic blueprint, found in the *elemental memory* (the building blocks of the system, *atomic memory* (the fluctuating patterns of atoms, and *evolutionary memory* (our biology) (Sadhguru, 2021, pp.60–61).

The all-encompassing theme to these external experiences is *societal impact*. From these external issues challenges are born that lie beyond anyone's control - but what ought to be teased from these experiences is how one responds.

And from my own experience and it's more than 13 years of experience now, if you would ask me what is accountability, I would say it's the field staff trying to do what they think is good from their social, from their religious, from their national ideologies and understanding more than clear measures that are channelled through the organisation, which you are expecting to have all of the accountability measures to take into effect from people from very remote culture, these are local cultures, so the message does not come through and it's only either as an individual approach or sometimes it's a very limited approach that you can feel any tangible measures in place (I.4.b).

The above extract discusses the gap in policy and practice and the absence of structural accountability. However, in the absence of accountable measures in top-down organisations, people naturally draw on their morals and values and societal influences to do good. This supports the findings on self-governance, empowerment, and learning as internally driven (Illich et al., 1977; Freire, 1972). The absence of internal approaches in modern industrial societies has meant that many of the current practices focus on external frameworks to become educated, empowered, and healthy, which creates dependency (Shiva, 1999; Illich *et al.*, 1977). In exploring further the concept of freedom discussed in this ethnography by an ability to respond to challenges through awareness, resistance, and perseverance. The data underpins a response mechanism to the thematic coding on freedom which is that, in the face of misery the key stakeholders chose humour, and from this emerges the code *humour in tragedy*.

I think that there was a problem in the connection. I do not recall my mother mentioning war much, which was brilliant. Maybe when we would have somebody coming for tea or lunch, she would mention that, and she would be very happy telling all of the stories, like oh they did that and we did this and that, and we have managed, and she would laugh about it. And I think that really helped us (I.4.a).

I know that this sounds very simplistic, but then even with this very simple example, it does not take place. People used to laugh about

it, "Ah this country," and I used to stay a lot with some of the Syrians in the camp or in the hospital. It was more of a comedy noir kind of thing; it's a dark comedy. And then it was "This, ah, country they said yesterday they would give us 200,000; maybe they can just give us 10,000 so that we can do this, this and that in the hospital," and they laugh about it, but it's sad in reality (I.4.b).

But we like each other a lot. My father, my real father, died when he was 92, and I could help him at the end of his life, even his wife too, and she knew me, and after I told her that I was her daughter. I had to tell her, because nobody told her: it was a very soap opera story [laughs] (I.7.a).

Similarly, the work by Solnit (2009, p.29) and first-person accounts of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake draw on the use of humour:

The best thing about the earthquake and fire was the way the people took them. There was no running around the streets, or shrieking, or anything of that sort. Any garbled accounts to the contrary are simply lies. They walked calmly from place to place and watched the fire with almost indifference, and then with jokes that were not forced either, but wholly spontaneous (Solnit, 2009, p.29).

Through an ancient wisdom lens, the data deconstructs freedom as an ability to create a space between challenges and themselves through laughter: "Your karma is not in what is happening to you; your karma is in the way you respond to what is happening to you" (Sadhguru, 2021, p.38). Each key stakeholder experienced various degrees of poverty, rurality, and marginality. A common experience was the learning that came from a lack of comfort and the responsibility and discipline that these *vivencias* (life experiences) taught them. As Illich (1973, xii–xiii) argues, "Austerity, which says something about people, has also been degraded, and has acquired a bitter taste, while for Aristotle, or Aquinas, it marked the foundation of friendship." Therefore, this link between discipline and creative playfulness is represented in the narratives of the key stakeholders.

The school was built in a way, was run in a way... so we had to wash the dishes, there was a school life, there was a government, there was a system of government, so we had that aspect of learning that was inbuilt, that they tried to do, apart from the formal education. I found a lot of the formal parts much less useful; sometimes, part of

what we learnt in history felt very irrelevant to my life. But again, when I think of it, it was positive. It was a positive experience (I.3.a).

And then she would say, only when you have a big trouble only when you cannot solve something or there is a problem then you can come to me, other than this then you do it independently. So, she used to help me do like the timetable, ah, like what to do what to study and then she would leave me to do that on my own (1.4.a).

Me I learnt from my mum, and yeah from my parents, yeah because I am the second born from my family so there was not an elder that I could look up to, so probably I can say at the age of 6 years they started to send me to go fetch water, go collect firewood, wash utensils, do small, small work, and yeah, of course, sometimes escort my mother to the garden to do a little bit of digging just to hope and then as a great continuous to do the agriculture more and more, but at the age of 6 years, you start to do some of those chores at home [laughs]. But still, like in that school, we were exposed to study, but were still responsible for yourself. No one would come to push you from bed, to go and read books. You had to plan your day because, like there were times when we were supposed to, you were supposed to go and clean utensils, supposed to mop, clean your compound, and to be ready in class at a required time (I.6.a).

In analysing this collection of extracts that feed into one another, a gap emerges within the empowerment and development discourse that fails to critically examine the link between privilege (the absence of danger and uncertainty) and disablement. From a health and wellbeing context external dependencies on comforts including technology and overdeveloped systems govern our decision-making (Peterson, 2018; Sennett, 2008; Illich et al., 1977; Illich, 1973). In the absence of introspection and reflection the creative process of people to co-create and imagine alternative futures becomes trampled on by restrictive systems. The data does not glorify pain and suffering but teases the learning that comes through from *viviencias*. Modern society has pre-fabricated needs for services that are alien to an individual's wellbeing and creative process (Shah, 2011; Illich et al., 1977). In an attempt to contextualise these findings, challenges, misery, and austerity are not experienced through the Western binary thinking of good and bad; rather, they are summative experiences, and from any experience, there is learning, which each key stakeholder has gained and applied with greater awareness (Schipper, 2012; Watts,

1987). The key stakeholders further support this finding through religion, faith, acceptance, and gratitude:

I sometimes resent it; also, I sometimes think, “Why did you do that?” but when I analyse it now, I realise that is what made us tough (I.1.a).

Yeah, I think, obviously my father, he is my favourite person in the world, but also, I think I’m grateful for a lot of other people who spend their time to... like teach me, to sort of listen to me, and help me through a difficult time (I.2.a).

If you are able to learn to respect all these different types of knowledge and really sit down and connect with people from all walks of life, I mean what you learn is absolutely incredible. I couldn’t put it in one life lesson. It’s just amazing, well the things I’ve learnt from people that have survived conflict, it helps, and this is where it crosses the border of with spirituality, because when you look at what people, how people survive atrocities and they can still come out grateful for what they have and they relativise suffering (I.3.a).

So later, I realised that was not the problem, because at first, that was a challenging situation. And during that time, when my mother died, of course, I grew up with my aunty, that’s why I had to go to school late, and no, I would do the housework while her children went to school. That’s how I came to grow old beyond class age... that would haunt me: why am I doing this, I am supposed to be at school, but I am not. I would be blaming maybe it was because I was an orphan and didn’t have a mother; all of those [thoughts] as you go, you find other people with different situations, even those with mothers and fathers who have everything. And then you say ah no, that is not the cause: maybe that’s pre-planned and of course I am a Christian (I.5.a).

The semi-structured questions enquired on a definition to empowerment. From all the varied responses, empowerment was present throughout their entire journey without discriminating against the challenges or hardships experienced, much like any other internal quality, like peace or humility. One of the commonalities between the definitions was the expansion of self-governance, which invariably led to confidence and a deeper understanding of who they were:

Exactly, I absolutely think, because often when I talk to young people, I ask what makes you happy? And obviously it is not taking drugs or killing people that makes you happy, but more that I want

to be this, I want that, I want a house, I want children of one sex: beyond that, there is not enough conversation on contentment, like what are you going to be content with, which also leads to managing expectations for yourself, not just what your family and your school and the community have. Do you have realistic expectations, I mean if we are looking at contentment, your unrealistic expectations would be less. And I mean, we have to talk about what does empowerment mean and where do religions come in, because in our community, religions are quite important and how religions [are practiced], and religions are not often talked about from a lay person point of view and especially not from a woman's point of view about contentment and empowerment and I think that for a young woman, it's to train, or give the capacity to pick this, because it's either like you have to have been married and have children for contentment and if you are not married and have children it is about making a stand that this is what it should be without all that stress to figure out what makes you content. But I mean informed decisions (I.1.b).

In this last quote, the key stakeholder makes no distinction between her professional experience and empowerment as a central discovery for knowing “Who am I really?” (M, 2017, 2012). This points to living with greater awareness (Sadhguru, 2021).

And I realised I didn't want to put myself in that position, so actually, very early on in the job, about three months in, I already tried to quit. I told my boss I needed the money. I had no follow-up job, but I just felt this situation was not healthy, and I told her that I thought this wouldn't work if we were continuing in this way and I wasn't working to my optimum, which I like to do, especially as a consultant. Like our reputation is what we have, that's what gives us recommendations, so, you kind of need have to take it a bit extra seriously, so I just told her I was not comfortable, and she was very apologetic, you know, she... and I thought if someone can apologise and see their place in this issue, I think that's a big thing to do, so I was happy to continue, but I realised later on that it's just, you know, some things are just how we are as people and maybe sometimes we just don't work with certain characters. Erm, and ah, actually when I quit, she tried to hire me back like a year later (I.3.a).

These expressions of how they began taking more control of their lives through exposure and lived experiences are found throughout the key stakeholder engagements.

Personally, for me, it's to do anything I want, say anything I want, to make a difference because in my personal life, I don't even have to speak about empowerment, from my father to my husband to my son. I'm always a little bit feminist, and I don't feel a need to prove anything because I know I am the greatest thing to ever happen to the household: that's a joke, but you know what I mean, but in the outside world, for me it's to be able to live in Sri Lanka, not to be scared to speak, to give my opinion, and to be recognised. I mean empowerment doesn't only come from within, but from the people around you and how they deal with you, and I feel really empowered when I speak with people, when I deliver a lecture, or when I'm at a social gathering. For example, last week we went out with a bunch of lawyers, and I felt really empowered because the men were in a very patriarchal profession but would listen to my opinion and seek my opinion, and that's empowerment for me. I feel very powerful (I.1.a).

The above-quoted key stakeholder makes an interesting final remark about the engagements that make her feel empowered, being listened to, and considered.

For me, it's something about a strength and a confidence, to both be yourself, grow, and go after what you want. You know, because sometimes being yourself does not mean you want to change. But I am of the belief that you want to change yourself sometimes. We are not perfect right? But some kind of confidence in who you are, the ability to then go after what you want. But a lot of empowerment for me is about confidence and strength, that you can feel that within you, whether it's like having a simple conversation, doing your job, being a mother, being a wife, just whatever being yourself, (ehm) I think you feel empowered when you can be yourself with confidence (I.3.a).

I would say, if this is the definition, or what you think the word is, I don't think it applies for societies because this would be the translation of having rights, law constitution and all of that. So, the rules that govern a lot of people because at that time there wouldn't be something such as women's empowerment, or men's empowerment, there is rights, and there are laws, if I am allowed, if I can express myself enough in a safe environment to have this or that or to change the legislation, then everyone is empowered

collectively. But individually, I think that two lessons are really important. One of them is that you realise that this is a very temporary journey: it's just a matter of 30 or 40 years and that you learn how to use it wisely and then to use it with a lot of respect and respect comes from within. Because when you respect yourself, you would invest in reading, you would invest in music, you would want to eat well, you would want to sleep well because you're respecting who you are and also, having the realisation that it is not for eternity. At that time, things will align; naturally, you will know what you need to do, and you will know what you need to do in dealing with people, dealing with yourself, dealing with animals, dealing with the environment (I.4.a).

To me, I think empowerment means like the ability to, ability to make decisions, ability to stand up for yourself, to speak up, to take care of yourself, to take up challenging roles, like, empowerment is, yeah, I can speak when I like, I don't like this I can say, you know what I'm not happy with this, I would then like to do this. You can stand up for a leadership position or any role, you can like, I, empowerment I am like able to take care of my needs, I can find something that I want on my own. I can struggle to find this thing, I can make a decision on my own, I don't have to follow any other person's decision, I can be confident, like, in picking up, in deciding, in refusing, like challenging your decisions, challenging your ideas, to speak up to be yourself to believe in yourself, like do what you feel like you feel is comfortable with you (I.6.a).

I don't know, empowerment, I think it's when you can join this essence that you have inside together with the world that the person that you have to be in the world. So, it's a kind of integration when you can integrate that value that you have that's not only an individual value but its' an essence value, and this essence is related to the whole humanity; it's not with family. I think empowerment is a very complex word because it can incorporate this individual learning in life, all the history that we face in our lives, but also this collective recognition, and even the vulnerability that we have. So, we integrate vulnerability with potential, vulnerability with resilience: empowerment is practical. It is not theoretical (I.7.a).

So, I believe empowerment, obviously. I don't have a definition in front of me, but I would say, I think it is the ability to make decisions for yourself. I think it's where you're individual. It's not being, it's the ability to choose and make informed decisions. So, empowerment for me needs to feed into the capability like what are the skills and capacities that you have to enable you to be empowered, so whether that is economic empowerment, it's one thing to know about how to start a business, but do you actually have the capabilities? Do you have the resources? Do you have the enabling environment to enable you to have a successful business?

so I think it is a number of factors that come into play internally and externally that can result in empowerment (I.8.a).

A further inextricable characteristic of the key stakeholders' journeys to empowerment and the position of empowerment through a policy and practice lens was *care*, which is discussed both at personal and professional levels of reflection.

I mean it's an ordinary marriage, but I know I am loved unconditionally, and that is one of life's greatest lessons... I think for me that's the greatest lesson I've learnt, and if someone were to ask me, that would be the thing I would say (I.1.a).

The importance of community and family bonds has, in many ways, helped facilitate each key stakeholder to continue on. The key stakeholders did not express a sense of individuality when recollecting their journeys and frequently referred to community knowledge and wisdom as essential lessons of morality and values passed down to them. An important sub-theme of deep involvement came from the theme of care, which included deep listening, humility, kindness, and respect:

Well, for me, it is the same as it is no different from personal empowerment. I mean you have a community. I mean community empowerment in the context of international development because it may mean something when the community is just there, being empowered doing their thing. But in this sense, where there is an interaction with people coming in trying to do a project or whatever. I think community empowerment is the same, allowing people to reach their potential through this new thing, through this new project, or to develop to become stronger to be more confident and to have this kind of voice and do things the way they need it to be done in a way which is best for them. So, you want to bring an education project to my community? I want to be educated in a certain way. Then, empowerment is allowing you to reach that goal in a way that I could, in a way that means that I can be confident that I can still be myself, ehm, and obtain what it is that I want. For me, a community then doesn't need to change the way they dress, or change what they eat, or change the hours that they do their prayers to accept this project. They need to be able to do what they feel is important to them, in a way that's important to them, and have a role, have a say in that. You are bringing

something: we want it right, but how can we contribute to that, because it's to help us (I.3.b).

Everything [laughs] well ah, because there is a difference when you look at a human being in terms of only biology or a case or a disease or when you start to see people as who they are, what are the challenges? What are the good things? How come they are that strong or weak? You see people, you see families, you see society. It really builds a certain lens when you manage to see everything differently later on in life, not only in professional life but also in life. And this is what made me really know that the humanitarian field and whether it would be work or research, that this is what I would really like to do. And I always wondered that... I wish my family had people who would have really given that sort of support that I am now providing, I wish that. I think that it would have changed a lot of things if I had felt that when I was a child, and it was not there (I.4.a).

Comments related to care were largely made in the policy and practice engagements. The comments were profound, as the key stakeholders drew from their own experiences of discrimination and racism. The key stakeholders continuously referred to the superficiality of care and mainly Western systems being involved in the caring professions (Kleinman, 2020; Lindekens and Jayawickrama, 2019; Illich et al., 1977). Their empowerment is manifested in their ability to become deeply involved in the various communities they work with despite understanding the superficiality of such structures. Moreover, within this wider theme of care that encompasses community support and family bonds, the key stakeholders received guidance by mentors:

Yeah, I think this mentoring approach can work well, it can give people a desire to reach their dreams or by having someone that they look up to and like, someone they can easily approach and ask for more support and guidance in difficult areas that they may be facing. I think if this is introduced in schools and other systems, I think this is a very, very great idea. Because, everywhere, like if you have someone you look up to, I don't know if it is a mentor, but someone who is available for you, so it is a little bit easier for these people to always feel free and esteemed, and for self-esteem to be raised because their mentors are always there to support them and give them more guidance on that. So, yeah, that would be a good idea. So, and also, yeah, we say like this school should not be just for education, like mentors can also be like inspirational speakers,

inspirational models, like this student also exposed to once in a while in school, visitors are invited to speak to them to encourage them. Like always, to have some other people who have made it share their stories, and so on, ... can also be good in different areas of life in education and even at work so, I think that is something that I would also recommend (I.6.b).

Acting humanely is an underlining commonality between the key stakeholders that emerged from their challenges and lived experiences. Morality and care surfaced regardless of external regulations. There is much for Western systems and high consumption societies to learn from regarding the need to become deeply involved. Moreover, the facilitation of empowerment needs to be re-shaped within a wellbeing context that allows the individual to flourish rather than comply (Nussbaum, 2000).

8.7 Linking the Themes with Aim and Objectives

The connection between disempowering systems and health and wellbeing is evident from the data. The empowerment of women and girls resides in the individual decision-making process of the person; this is conclusive from the key stakeholder engagements (Page and Czuba, 1999).

The overarching aim of this PhD is a critical examination of contemporary, ancient, and non-mainstream pedagogies and philosophies to formulate a methodological pathway to empower girls and women living in the context of uneven development – the findings in this chapter crystallize the pedagogical approaches that facilitate empowerment. The reductionist approach in formal mainstream education has marginalised essential learning that comes from life and our experiences. From this inclusive lens, there is a direct correlation in learning that becomes a reciprocal relationship between the learner and the learning environment. The constriction of education into formal classroom setting has a direct correlation to disempowerment. Formal education as disempowering is a main finding, particularly from the British key stakeholder, who experienced discrimination and a general sense of unawareness with formal education:

I had to do this to get noticed to be able to be put in a higher group. So, I think I've always felt right' from my whole career that I've never been... it's like' that imposter syndrome of I'm not really meant to be here so (I.9.a).

The systematic exclusion and discrimination felt through formal education limited key stakeholders unnecessarily. In connecting the findings and analysis to the overall aim of the thesis, the richness of informal learning is at the forefront in terms of empowering pedagogy (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2019). Through thematic analysis on what facilitates empowering pedagogy, elements of exposure, *vivencia* (lived experience), intergenerational knowledge, responsibility as freedom, adaptability, and morals and values are key. Whether those pedagogical characteristics are implemented in a formal, non-formal, or informal setting, they characterise the building blocks that facilitate the key stakeholders in resisting, persevering, and experiencing through an embodiment of knowledge rather than through memorising facts (M, 2017; Schipper, 2012; Illich, 1970). This intricate web of learning lies at the core of the intelligence of care. This care is shown in their approach towards others and themselves, their application of non-judgement, humility, and deep involvement. Furthermore, the key stakeholders have found happiness and meaning even in the light of challenges endured. All key stakeholders demonstrated an authentic acceptance of their whole selves. This ability to engage deeply within themselves and their narratives has allowed for deep awareness and involvement in the lives of others (Kleinman, 2020).

In meeting the thesis's overall objectives, the chapter's findings depict the essence of empowerment, which encapsulates the need for connecting with ourselves and others through care. In this, the emerging methodological pathway to facilitate the empowerment of girls and women can borrow from a psychological theoretical framework of countertransference (Eenwyk, 2001).

8.8 Conclusion

The research findings have provided key insights into the complex processes and learning that each key stakeholder has experienced in their journey. The

findings further show that defining empowerment is of lesser importance; rather, these narratives have allowed for the essence of empowerment and its common characteristics to be better understood. In this deep emersion from both a personal and a professional lens, what can be concluded is there is a desperate need for people involved in caring professions and its systems to engage with communities and women. To capture empowerment is futile if one seeks to grasp it. Empowerment, as shown in the data, is like observing a mosaic or tapestry: one cannot single out its beginning or its end. Rather than to understand empowerment from girls' and women's perspectives, one needs to become involved; "To discover the ultimate reality of life – the absolute, the eternal, God, you must cease to try to grasp it in the forms of idols" (Watts, 1987, p.28). In essence, the intellectualisation of empowerment has led the Western approach to commercialise women's agency through development agendas, programmes and policy (Shiva, 1999).

In addressing the research question on whether educational experiences facilitate the overall empowerment of women from non-Western societies, is largely dependent on the awareness exercised in the various educational experiences, particularly regarding formal education. The key stakeholders, who had experienced the most poverty, marginalisation, and rurality, were able to capitalise on formal education and created opportunities through determination, perseverance, and hard work. Education in that sense did not govern them, nor did education empower them. Rather they understood what they needed to get out of the education system. In contrast, the British key stakeholder found her initial educational experience all-consuming; she later learnt to navigate the system in a way that suited her. That core learning of survival or intergenerational knowledge may have provided an awareness. However, the structures for formal education were mainly disempowering, discriminative, oppressive, and racist. In essence, each key stakeholder demonstrated to different degrees the ability to self-govern.

Through a health and wellbeing lens, the pressure of formal education and certain aspects of a rigid curriculum resulted in the key stakeholders experiencing anxiety and negative effects on their wellbeing. However, for all the key stakeholders from East Africa who attended boarding schools with a specialised

leadership curriculum, their learning revolved around responsibility, amongst other things. This allowed them to engage directly with community projects that resulted in exposure. In this way, health, wellbeing, and making meaningful choices was a compilation of learning through experience. Despite all the key stakeholders being highly educated, their confidence came from their ability to manoeuvre, adapt, and engage with others. In this diversity of being, which extended beyond their jobs and education, what made each key stakeholder empowered was a deeply reflective engagement with themselves; this came across through their sensitivity and openness to present themselves through their humanity rather than their positions, titles, or accolades. To conclude, the research findings explicitly show how formal education disables girls and women from both Western and non-Western societies. The ethnography point to a gap, an inability of Western structures and industrial societies to care. What is evident present in these structures is the absence of introspection, deep listening, and involvement resulting in a false sense of confidence in empowerment being tagged to jobs and education. Thus, empowerment is the individual manifestation of choice.

9 Discussion and Recommendations

9.1 Introduction

The research findings of this thesis were drawn from the scoping review, narrative literature review, and the three-method process that delves deep into the lived experiences of empowerment, education, and wellbeing from a range of key stakeholders in complex social and political contexts. The research findings critique the institutionalisation of education on two fronts: the disabling characteristics of rigid structures (Chapter 8) and absence of health and wellbeing as core concepts to formal education. The research findings explicitly discuss the pedagogical approaches that positively impacted health. The findings showcase an education ecology that is not limited to formal learning. Rather, the relations, exposure, and learning through experience sustain the link between health and education. This chapter is a crucial component of this thesis, anchoring the various segments of this research. The chapter is composed of two sections; the first is a synthesis of the research findings, and the second section presents the proposed framework.

The first section to this chapter elaborates on key points pertaining to the research findings and presents a synthesis of the three-stage method process.

1. Women are already empowered

One of the key findings on the empowerment of women is, that women are already empowered. This finding is substantiated in the research findings and in the scoping and narrative literature review conducted. The drive to empower women through mainstream development programmes are premised on a false assumption that women are devoid of empowerment (Shiva, 1999). The key stakeholder engagements (Chapter 8) detail women that have experienced a conscientization process through a range of educational experiences that fall beyond the remit of formal education alone. The vulnerability paradigm that is applied to women within an uneven development context replicates a false narrative of invisibility. The application of empowerment as an external process would struggle to

explain the successes of the key stakeholders in this research. The ethnographies in the research are not of vulnerable women seeking to be saved, rather, they are stories of women that resisted the social, cultural, political, economic, and environmental inequalities that surrounded much of their upbringing (Scott, 1985). The empowerment of these women was displayed, in their everyday actions. The key stakeholders persevered through broken school systems that were discriminatory. The key stakeholder 1.9.a – 1.9.b refused to give up on herself despite her dyslexia and other social and cultural barriers. Similarly, key stakeholders 1.8.a - 1.8.b overcame gender norms that discouraged her from pursuing further education. In light of these findings, the tension between education as inherently good, emerges. To credit a broken mainstream education system as the saviour would be to misinterpret the research findings - It was not schooling that empowered these women, but their conscious and deliberate use of school as a tool to progress. It is also important to acknowledge that formal education played no role in some of ethnographies. For example, my grandmother and that of the women from Chipko and many more are examples of women that display the same empowerment, resistance and perseverance and those formally educated (Shiva, 1999). In this, the finding that women are already empowered can be substantiated. This key finding links health into the discussion of empowerment (Chapter 5: Narrative Literature Review). The experience of empowerment increased feelings of freedom, confidence, joy, and wellbeing – positively impacting on their mental health and overall health (Chapter 7 and Chapter 8).

2. Uncertainty and danger are learning experiences that remain within the private sphere.

Uncertainty and danger and or challenges and suffering are some of the most coded themes in the research findings (see Chapter 8, page 334). The world depicted in the narratives of the key stakeholders expose these uncertainties and dangers through their experiences of conflict, poverty, refugee experience and displacement. During the periods of depravation

and hardship, perseverance and conquest resulted in the formation of empowerment as an internal quality. This key finding is found interwoven in all the ethnographies. All of the women in this research are authentic in their journeys. Thus, this chapter further elaborates on the theme *challenges experienced* as a fundamental educational experience. In the story of the musk deer (see section 9.2), which is central in this chapter to deconstruct the meaning of empowerment. In the story of the musk deer, were it not for its tragic collapse, the realisation of the origin of the aroma may not have happened. Similarly, if the many narratives that colour this research were void of suffering and the *unknowns* experienced by the key stakeholders their realisation of who they were and what they were capable of may have been compromised. Through a pedagogical lens and drawing from the work of Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1972), who highlights a central flaw with mainstream education in a banking style system that frustrates the learners creative process, this research proposes an alternative framework grounded ancient wisdom. Freire (1972, p.164) argues that:

To achieve critical consciousness of the facts that it is necessary to be the “owner of one’s own labour,” that labour “constitutes part of the human person,” and that “a human being can neither be sold nor can he sell himself” is to go a step beyond the deception of palliative solutions. It is to engage in the authentic transformation of reality in order, by humanising that reality, to humanise women and men.

As argued in this chapter, the essence of this approach draws on self-governance. Our education has become another item that belongs to the global market economy. The distinction that needs to be drawn from the various educational experiences that facilitate empowerment is the learnings that *still* remain solely in the domain of the learner. In this way, the learner owns their learning, bringing agency back to education. This, in turn, means that learning becomes part of a deeper understanding of: “Who am I really?” However, if we compare this with the formal education system, which lends itself as a commodity through grading, a sell-buy relationship is

more readily available (Schneider and Hutt, 2014). This chapter argues that transactional nature of education are largely non-consensual relations that hinder personal development (Giroux, 2001; Illich, 1978, 1973; Illich et al., 1977; Freire, 1972).

3. Empowerment is a quality

Empowerment is discussed as an internal quality. Throughout research-methods one, two and three, the interconnectedness of empowerment and wellbeing come through. Many of the engagements discuss mental health issues and wellbeing when experiencing systems as hierarchal (see Chapter 8). Key stakeholder 1.3.a – 1.3.b experienced stress and anxiety affecting her wellbeing in a particular job placement. It was through reflection that she stepped back (page 378). Realisation as a process was present throughout the ethnographies and informed the key stakeholders to make decisions that ultimately improved their general wellbeing. In order to reach this state, the key stakeholders have confronted the ‘who am I really?’, a question pertinent throughout their journeys. This key finding further establishes empowerment as an internal phenomenon. Jobs and school come and go but what is substantial is an educational experience that facilitates a deep introspection that stimulates a conscious and deliberate intention.

In many ways health and wellbeing is an afterthought regarding education and empowerment. The wellbeing of the key stakeholders was pronounced throughout all the key findings and is reflected in the research themes and subthemes. The experience of empowerment is embedded in care, joy, confidence, solidarity, spirituality and self-governance which are all qualities. Through their journeys these women have continued to cultivate these qualities and apply them in their professional contexts as there is no hard division between who they are and what they do. The key stakeholders have crafted their empowerment – revealing the personal nature of this phenomena (Sennett, 2008). This craftsmanship pours out in the engagements. The skilful storying from the key stakeholders is very similar to the words of wisdom that my grandmother imparts (Chapter 6).

4. Inclusivity is a fundamental practice to the journey to empowerment.

The act of mothering, inclusivity, and care as a non-gender-based concept is a connecting thread throughout the research findings. The virtual community became a community due to its inclusive traits. The solidarity that the women members of this organisation felt was expressed in their cheer towards one another. The mentoring and support that they felt allowed them to act with more confidence and negotiate differently with other donor organisations (Chapter 7). Drawing on the ethnographic account, my grandmother and mother experienced empowerment because of their inclusivity and collective nature. The choices made resemble similar experiences and situations lived by the key stakeholders. In this, the inclusivity that is discussed in the research findings is not exclusive to family and close friends. The key stakeholders in this research are all care givers in their own fields. Women's empowerment, health and education are all issues that they work with. Their approach to working with women and affected communities is one of equal partnership, humanity, and compassion.

5. The role of pre-existing traits plays a key role on realising empowerment.

Empowerment is discussed in this thesis as multi-dimensional (Page and Czuba, 1999). Each key stakeholder expressed their empowerment in different forms relevant to their pre-existing traits. For example, one of the key stakeholders was adventurous and loved to travel and become exposed to new places as she described a thirst for new knowledge (page 403); whilst another member enjoyed being in her surroundings and having a close-knit circle around, without the need to seek adventure (page 400). Similar dynamics are found in the virtual community and its members. The way the members communicate and action stem from that innate trait that is unique to them. Drawing from the autoethnographic account, the contrast between my grandmother and mother is sparse regarding their empowerment journeys. How they express and realise their empowerment has resulted in leading different lives, but nonetheless they are both empowered. This thesis has established a proposed framework that acknowledges these

differences in women and aides those that work with women and communities to engage and understand the role that pre-existing traits play in the realisation of empowerment.

The second section of the discussion and recommendations chapter is a proposed framework substantiated by additional literature and is part of the recommendations section. The discussion on the findings weaves in the aim of the thesis and objectives. Throughout the key stakeholders' learning in the three-method's process, formal, non-formal and informal education are central to their journey to empowerment and closely tied to their wellbeing. In this broad approach to education that looks beyond the formal technical training that has become the school, learning is not treated as synonymous to education. This chapter further argues that education has become an extension of the marketplace that assaults the critical consciousness (Giroux, 2001; Freire, 1972). In this holistic approach and non-compartmentalisation of the stakeholder's experience, the discussion chapter looks beyond jobs, professions, educational consumption, and the quantitative metrics to address the research question (Kleinman, 1995; Illich, 1978, 1973, 1970; Illich et al., 1977). The research design feeds into this discussion and recommendations chapter by providing an ample methodological framework that facilitates the critical examination of current pedagogical approaches, philosophies and analysis of non-mainstream pedagogy, philosophies, and approaches in order to formulate a framework substantiated by the discussion and mini literature review on the issues of empowerment in accordance with the aim and objectives of the thesis:

- To examine the mainstream knowledge systems, policies, and practices on education and empowerment.
- To analyse philosophies and ancient wisdoms on pedagogical approaches that facilitate empowerment, which have been marginalised by the colonial and neo-colonial projects. The destruction and marginalisation of these non-mainstream pedagogical approaches is weaved into the critical examination of education.

- To formulate a framework to facilitate the empowerment of girls and women in contrast to intervention-based educational approaches.

This chapter makes a consistent effort to discuss the findings and address the research questions. In addition, the chapter refers to the scoping review question: ***Do contemporary educational approaches facilitate empowerment?***

Furthermore, the narrative literature review question is addressed:

Can ancient pedagogical approaches be adopted to facilitate empowerment?

The overall research question for the three-method is discussed:

Do educational experiences empower women in non-Western societies?

In addressing the personal accounts of the journeys seeking empowerment, the following are revisited:

What constitutes empowerment through education?

Virtual community observation and participation:

What is the experience of empowerment through education?

Finally, from the key informant engagements, the following question is addressed:

How does education facilitate the empowerment of girls and women in relation to health and wellbeing and the ability to make meaningful life choices?

The Discussion chapter elaborates on the specifics of 'becoming', which captures the ethos of the thesis. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the findings whilst weaving in a general discussion of the social, political, cultural, and spiritual, pedagogical aspects that have shaped the stakeholders' empowerment, wellbeing, and education. This chapter draws from the theoretical, analytical framework of the methodology chapter (Chapter 4). In addition, this chapter explores the Western philosophy of existentialism that has ties to phenomenology. Existentialism, the philosophy of experience, helps further explore the concept of becoming beyond jobs and school (Spiegelberg, 1960).

In drawing from existentialism, the ontological component to this research adopts a humanising tone using a qualitative dimension of what the compilation of experiences means to the key stakeholders' journeys to empowerment (Todres and Wheeler, 2001, p.6). This chapter draws on the work of existentialist scholars such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Martin Heidegger, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Noreen Khawaja and Frantz Fanon as fundamental thinkers in unravelling human existence, and concepts such as *eudemonia* – human flourishing, and authenticity, as central to this discussion (Crowell, 2020). In addition, Buddhist theory, Buddhist psychology, and Buddhist traditions are integral to the research's analytical framework providing a deliberate and sophisticated methodology (Laksiri, 2016, Fung Key, 2011). Finally, drawing from the narrative literature review findings and ancient wisdom, effective technologies such as *yoga* and *vipassana* (mindfulness and meditation) are discussed in relation to their pedagogical adaptability for a framework that builds on attitudinal change and tool building (Vivekananda, 1989; Niwano, 1989; Ven, no date). This chapter brings a rich interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and intradisciplinary approach to its discussion and recommendations, borrowing from philosophies and theories from Western and non-Western traditions. Furthermore, the chapter looks at a dual function to operationalise empowerment, both in the content of the findings and by introducing a framework that guides facilitators in engaging with women's and girls' empowerment.

9.2 The Musk Deer

The challenges experienced by the key stakeholders and the virtual community depict a darkness of the unknown navigated by the key stakeholders. These experiences are just as much part of the landscape of empowerment as the victories. Victories are understood as overcoming challenging that contribute to lucidity and awareness in achieving a better sense of being. Thus, in the amalgamation of experience, a deeper sense of self arises, and it is through this precise entanglement of tones that meaning unfolds (Watts, 1987). This chapter does not attempt to compartmentalise these experiences as this would

misrepresent the research findings. Similarly, just as one cannot isolate the many branches of a tree, one cannot set apart the many segments that make up the lived experiences that bring about our sense of humanness. The various philosophies and theories explore the journey of existence to essence (Crowell, 2020). In this uncertainty that is life, Kierkegaard (1843) argues that existence emerges as a philosophical problem in the struggle around the paradoxical presence of God; this is echoed by Nietzsche (1924, p.167) in the phrase “God is dead, and we have killed him, you and I!”; challenging *nihilism*, the belief that life is meaningless. In this evocative account of the journey to becoming, the absence of an all-powerful God looking upon us aligned to Christian theology arouses liberation, setting forth a path of discovery without God (Nietzsche, 1924). Similarly, the biblical story of the banishment of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden in Genesis (3:22-24) marks a departure from the presence of God. As predicted by the cunning snake, this divorce into the unknown does not result in death but opens an unmarked journey that emphasises essence post existence. In this journey into the wilderness through challenges, a new beginning of humanity unfolds. No longer are Adam and Eve subject to a reduced experience of life, but ‘like’ God, they are endowed with knowledge: “And the LORD GOD said, ‘The [hu]man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil’” (Genesis, 3:22).

Sartre's slogan 'Existence precedes essence' (Crowell, 2020), unravels a non-preordained account of what it means to be human, positioning humanity in the journey of existing (Crowell, 2020). From an Ancient African philosophical perspective, the Ubuntu philosophy provides a similar account to the meaning of existence and essence. What marks the difference between ancient wisdom and Western philosophy is methodological pathway attributed to wisdom. From an Ubuntu lens, the pre-dehumanised person needs others before fulfilling their humanity (Ngomane, 2019; Zulu, 2018; Khomba, 2011). As argued from an ancient wisdom lens, the reference of *no-thing*, the unknown, discussed in the *Katha Upanishad* (Shloka 11):

Beyond that great Self is the Unmanifest – avyaktam – and beyond the Unmanifest is the Sprit – the purusha. That purusha is the final

goal – that is the end of the journey. There is nothing beyond (M, 2017, p.53).

The limitlessness and oneness, a recurring theme in understanding empowerment (Freire, 1972; Illich, 1970; Watts, 1987). The ancient Indian Upanishad story of the musk deer (*kasturi-mriga*) embodies the narratives of the key stakeholders throughout the three-method process on their journeys to empowerment. This story sets the tone for the discussion with an illustrative account of pursuit, which is central to journeying through existence (M, 2018).

One of the evocative songs by *Kabir Das*, a weaver, singer, and saint that lived in the 15th century in Benares, India, recounts the story of the musk deer that roams in the deep Himalayan regions, in the thick of the forest. Unbeknown to the deer, which trots freely, he has the musk gland underneath his skin. When the breeding season swoops in, this musk gland releases a substance that fills the air with perfume. The musk deer goes around searching for this aroma, poking its nose into thorns and bushes, unable to find it. The deer with its bloodied nose makes this pursuit his life. If only it could find the source of this heavenly aroma, the deer would be profoundly happy. Finally, exhausted, the deer falls onto the forest floor, piercing its belly with its tusk; the air suddenly becomes overwhelmingly intoxicated with the aroma. In this final moment, the deer understands the scent was his all along (M, 2018).

9.3 Befriending the Unknown

The findings from key stakeholder engagements bring forth a concentrated account of journeying, which undoubtedly leads the reader to examine central questions about **what distinguishes these women from the rest?** And **why them?** In the pursuit of empowerment, a common tendency is to define empowerment, capture it, perhaps seal it, and sell it, as argued by Watts (1987, p.48), who traces the compulsion to define back to the church and to science during their struggle to grasp reality by definitions:

The clash between science and religion has not shown that religion is false, and science is true. It has shown that all systems of definition are relative to various purposes and that none of them actually "grasp" reality. And because religion was being misused as a means for actually grasping and possessing the mystery of life, a certain measure of 'debunking' was highly necessary.

Similarly, the clash between international agencies and NGOs' promotion of empowerment for girls and women typifies a similar attempt to own women's empowerment (United Nations, 2015; Cornwall, 2007); this is argued as the link to coloniality (Walter, 2007). From this premise, women are required to go through a process to obtain empowerment from institutions through training and education. The scoping review findings showed a plethora of literature that assigns women's and girls' empowerment to external circumstances, implying, an unchallenged assumption that women and girls are devoid of empowerment (Graetz et al., 2018; Njoh and Ananga, 2016; Unterhalter, Heslop, and Mamedu, 2013). This dominant presumption of empowerment brings us back to the story of the musk deer in pursuit of its aroma. The discussion surrounding the empowerment of women and girls is filled by experts, in the guise of agencies and organisations that coin buzz words depending on their pre-set agendas (Cornwall, 2007). Within these spaces that are orchestrated largely by advocates representative of Western ideals for the liberation and flourishing of women from mainly non-Western and marginalised backgrounds, there remains little space for a critique on the facilitators of empowerment. In addition, to expand on this point further, the empowerment discourse is immersed in a power imbalance that is deepened by the scant ontological and epistemological understanding of empowerment from women themselves, resulting largely in a north-led approach. In a similar manner, the research findings challenge the dominant discourse and worldviews that stem from the presumptions imposed on women that lies parallel to the ethos of this thesis that critiques the education system and not the pupil (Illich et al., 1977; Illich, 1978, 1973, 1970). It is argued that this power imbalance is a result of the dilution of women's voices, particularly from the Global South with experiences of marginality,

poverty, and rurality. The research findings attribute the lack of engagement with women's empowerment to an arrogance endured by many of the key stakeholders,

Because if you ask me, is there any project that you have for women for black, for, we have lots of it here we don't need any more. But this is not the case, I think the discussion should move, for okay, I'm I repeating? I'm I repeating what I received from the power to the unpowered community and invisible? They are invisible, and we are repeating their invisibility when we don't listen to them. We are repeating that they are okay; they are poor. I am, I know better than them, and we don't know anything. If we go to the main point, we learn a lot with those communities, more than we teach. What we have there, we share; we share our experiences. I think our main goal should be sharing, listening. Of course, of course, there are some projects that are meeting those goals but very few (7.1b).

This extract expresses frustration with agencies working with affected communities. The key stakeholder comes from an indigenous background and experienced poverty and hardship whilst raised by a single mother in South America. Now, an academic, she points to a pattern of repetition fuelled by ignorance, endemic to activities that focus on the empowerment of women and girls and deprived communities. The key stakeholder discusses how systems repeat the invisibility of people through a lack of engagement and presence (Kleinman, 2017). Her invitation to self-reflect comes from an important premise of experience – she was that invisible community, and she advocates humility, promoting community knowledge above formal schooling. In further support of this argument, key stakeholder 3, in her engagement, makes a candid remark about a 'false confidence' syndrome, experienced by those highly educated. Again, this is a non-Western woman who draws from her African upbringing and British schooling. In this extract she reflected on her work and the falsehood that is intertwined with status:

I think that the formal education system, at least the Western one, gives you a false sense of confidence, that you know you can resolve anything if you read the right books. You know. And that is just not how life works, and it gives you this kind of confidence when you go out, and you think you can know it all. I think it goes to the wrong place for knowledge.

I said it goes to the wrong place for knowledge in terms of you knowing what it means to live your life. So, because you are clever, because you got a first-class in your bachelor, it does not mean that when you show up at some village or at some office that you are good, that you are prepared to do that well, you just know things and because you know those things, you think you are prepared to do that well. That is why it is this false sense of confidence, and you feel that you can resolve everything because you can refer to the book or the theory, and that is just not life.

By this time, I understood this problem when you had this overconfidence and your knowledge, so I built my research where I could really learn from my participants and respect my participants' knowledge, which was mostly non-formal or informal, so I did that differently, but the rest of it was the usual formal route (I.3.a).

In this extract key stakeholder 3, points to an education system based on ignorance and arrogance, which inevitably discriminates (Hegar, 2012; Rodney, 1972; Illich, 1970). This extract gives insight into a system that induces dependency, discouraging self-reflection, deep listening, and engagement. Illich (1970, p.1) argues that this consumption model has confused "teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new." Finally, the findings discuss the relationship between the key stakeholders and formal mainstream education. The findings of how this relationship is entered are based on an awareness that studying was part and parcel of what had to be done.

In the case of key stakeholders, who had exposure to a rich community and familial learning, schooling was a tool for progression and reaching a level of accreditation to permit these women to do what they were passionate about. What needs to be teased from the findings is the distinction between those key stakeholders, who had community learning and those who did not. Thus, it was not because of school but rather through school that certain objectives were met.

So, all those things I think define who I am, so if I look at formal education, we have always been pushed to study that going to university was a given and nobody was not going to do higher studies. So, my mother was quite a strong woman who had achieved a lot. She was a journalist, which was also rare at that time. My father was a journalist as well, and he was very open to

women's rights, and he used to call himself a feminist, so one thing he treated us no differently to a boy, also because it was only just girls, we did not know what it was like to have a boy in the house; we were tough and did everything like any boy. Then my parents also encouraged all that. Studying was also part of the whole plan; everyone had to study. The next thing for me is that after my, during my A-levels and my undergraduate years, the sudden insurrection happened in Sri Lanka, where universities were closed for three to four years, and I went to a local college because I thought it was partly private, so it was the only place that was open and I just did the entrance exam just because I was bored and I passed, and I wanted to be an English teacher. So, the shift was huge for me, and my parents were very strong socialists, and we were brought up in that social, social welfare kind of rights, kind of background, and, we all have them, and I had it very strongly. And the shift from teaching English was part of that social welfare kind of approach, but as English is very much treasured in our country and the access for non-English-speaking people to learn English properly is difficult so, hence my wish to teach English. But then, when I became a lawyer, all of that changed, and my social activism kind of a thing continued. And then I think my life has been pretty ordinary.

So, I do a lot of activisms, rights kind of work, and my masters and PhD have also contributed to that, so to formal learning and what I learn from society, my family, people, my peers, the larger global feminist all of that kind of [thing] merged together. Because, if I say I was a commercial lawyer, what I learnt from the others would be very different, but since my learning and my job and everything is pretty much the same, I kind of live the same thing all over (I.1.a).

This extract from a key stakeholder engagement brings to life this fine distinction in engaging with schooling from an awareness stance. What is important to tease out from this extract is the key stakeholder's familial informal learning, the socialist values and examples her family displayed, the non-judgement from her father, and the confidence she was equipped with. This learning influenced her headstrong decision-making and will. Whether she became an English teacher or a lawyer, her activism was instigated by her home learning. This extract further leads the discussion to examine the bravery displayed by her in the form of 'choice'. The key stakeholder responded to the insurgency in Sri Lanka with suppleness, allowing for her plans to adapt to the circumstances,

"So, it is not the physical situation that causes misery. It is you; your karma is in the way you respond to what is happening to you" (Sadhguru, 2021, p.38).

The key stakeholder extract delineates an important junction where health and wellbeing can be intractably examined concerning informal learning – community learning. In specific contexts in which key stakeholders are largely reliant upon formal mainstream schooling, the findings show a level of disablement experienced (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999; Illich, 1973). This is argued by Giroux (2001, p.xxii):

Teachers are under siege like they never have been in the past, and schools are assaulted relentlessly by the powerful forces of neoliberalism, which wants to turn them into sources of profit. What is good for Disney and Microsoft is now the protocol for how we define schooling, learning, and the goals of education. Schools are no longer considered public good but a private good, and the only form of citizenship increasingly being offered to young people is consumerism.

This scathing critique by Giroux (2001), an intellectual strongly influenced by the work of Freire (1972), on modern schooling supports previous scholars who critique the compartmentalisation of education and its baseless premise to cater for the health and wellbeing of the pupil (Nussbaum, 1997; Illich, 1978, 1973, 1970; Illich et al., 1977; Freire, 1972; Rodney, 1972). Drawing from the findings and analysis of the autoethnographic account, which discusses my experience with formal education as a refugee child, the focus of Western education was to receive accreditation to then enter the marketplace, better known as the rat race. Watts (1987, p.69) poses an important question: "How are we to experience life as something other than a honey trap in which we are the struggling flies?" The dissatisfaction that edges over you as you live to do something unstimulating is an experience that the key stakeholders expressed at different point. Determination, perseverance, and resistance are underpinnings of this commonality between the various key stakeholders across the different research stages (Ryser, 2012). Key stakeholder 9 narrates with fervour her experience with Western mainstream education and its adverse impact to her wellbeing and mental health deterioration.

The absence of a rich community learning environment and familial belonging resulting from various issues, created an extra layer of dependency for the key stakeholder. This experience echoes with my own: being taken away from my community and wider family resulted in unsafe and exploitative settings for myself and that of my mother. Key stakeholder 9 discusses much of her journey through mainstream education as floating adrift, and by chance stumbling across a supportive teacher and sports education. Her perseverance and determination allowed her to stay afloat. Thus, in her experience, the education system broke her as much as it offered a log to cling to. The commonality to these findings is the dependency factor created by mainstream education that prevents the person from liberation. In this way, the mainstream curriculum layered with hierarchy and rigidity is experienced as a mechanism of bondage (Illich, 1978, 1970; Illich et al., 1977).

I have always been, I think, my mind's always active and it's always hungry to learn and especially because I felt that my learning came at such a later stage, so I felt like there was this need to constantly feed in, so, for example, I am obsessed with constantly buying books. If I buy a book, I start reading maybe even the first page and it gives a quote about something, and I am like what is that quote and then going, ah I want to buy this book, or I want to get this book and find out. I do not always finish the books, but I definitely always like to jump from [one to another] and it almost feels like my mind is always constantly like a ping pong ball always constantly wanting to learn information. So, I knew that I do not feel like I would be someone that ever just settles for a job that is just monotonous and just doing it to get the money and for the food. It is not like that. I have got this drive and this hunger in me to want to do more, and so with the career guidance I knew it was not, I was doing it for Jane and myself to get what we needed.

Ah, depressed it was a mix of emotions I used to go through, I used to go through this, I would go through this roller-coaster of feeling kind of angry that why is the system like this and I have got to be in this sort of position, then also really quite low because I was waiting and figuring out like, to, I knew I was not in the right place and I was having to do that Monday to Friday get up, drive to work, do this job that I really did not feel that my heart was in (I.9.a).

The extract of the key stakeholder is a candid account of the oppressive structure of Western mainstream education and its effects on her wellbeing. It is oppressive in the imposition it places on individuals and reliance, which diminishes self-governance. From a pedagogical perspective, mainstream education failed to quench her first for 'learning' (Illich, 1970). Her individuality, which included her dyslexia, was unnoticed due to the uniformity of the curriculum (Giroux, 2001). In light of, the disjointed link between mainstream education and empowerment lies the need to conduct the narrative literature review that could enquire on ancient pedagogical approaches and their adaptability to facilitate empowerment. This discussion chapter argues that our current mainstream education system is a form of restraint to the individual, obstructing learning (Giroux, 2001; Vivekananda, 1989; Illich, 1970), thus, re-positioning the educated as the newly enslaved. Full reliance on mainstream education is like a well-trodden path that encroaches on a person's ability to become supple as it disables the learner through a system of accreditation. From an empowerment perspective, what distinguishes the key stakeholders from a state of bondage and disempowerment resides in the awareness born from their lived experience. This is argued as journeying through the unknown. Throughout the three-method process, the individual struggles experienced by the key stakeholders hold a key defining factor attributed to their journey through empowerment which is *choice*. From the findings and analysis of the key stakeholder engagements, experience is a crucial process of their empowerment (Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio, 2019). One can compare formal education with the church as both institutions hold your hand to a preordained path. The chaos of life results in a liberating learning experience; this becomes the beginning of when one befriends the unknown.

I continued my search for... when I divorced? I divorced when? I married when I was 20 years old, very young and I had my two kids when I was 24 and 26 years old. And then when I divorced, I was 30 years old and then I went away from the Catholic church. Divorced and [being a] catholic is something that cannot relate. So, and then I started my own way of looking at spirituality in a different way. So, I went to the '*Perpushina*.' I don't know if you are familiar with '*Perpushina*?' That is a meaning from a Buddhist way of looking to reality, but its philosophy. That kind of a meditation that today they

call mindfulness, but at this time, it was very [much] the roots of *Perpushina*, and this is something that I did. I went to the Reiki. I learnt Reiki and started working with Reiki, and finally I could see medicinal plants that I loved the idea of working with, and I started working with medicinal plants and researching about that. And this relates to my ancestors, to my family from the North-East of Brazil, and I can tell you that I am the only one in the whole family that is interested in medicinal plants. No other, even my mother, she never recognised there (I.7.a).

In this extract by key stakeholder 7, she reflects upon her divorce as a departure point, when she faced insecurity and the impermanence of life and change. The key stakeholder acted from a position of self-governance, moving into the unknown to create a new beginning. In this void of insecurity, the key stakeholder discusses how she navigated and cut loose her relationships with the church that represented control, which no longer served her due to its inadaptability to be inclusive. Confucius, the Chinese philosopher (551 BC – 479 BC), has a clever example:

When you use a bowl, do you use the empty space or the walls that surround it? You use the space because without the space, nothing can be received. If it is already full, nobody can give you anything (M, 2012, p.3).

In the same manner, the *letting go*, the walking into the abyss of life is a determining aspect of this discussion. This is seen throughout the many journeys to empowerment: for example, in my mother's departure from Colombia, she heads into a strange country without any form of security whilst leaving me behind. In addition, the virtual community was full of members from all over the world who set up women's organisations from their own volition in the face of challenges and uncertainty, creating spaces that did not exist before. The lives and experiences of the key stakeholders provide detailed accounts of fleeing war, adapting, and braving judgement and societal restrictions as they moved towards the many unknowns in their lives. In examining the existing global policies on education, empowerment and the analysis of non-mainstream and mainstream pedagogical approaches, the overarching question is: ***Do educational experiences empower***

women in non-Western societies? The answer is yes, if education experiences are construed to mean the fullness of learning through non-formal, informal, and aspects of formal education. The findings show that the formal education system has disempowered the key stakeholders who participated in this research. However, their ability to use formal education as an advantage needed their determination, persistence, awareness, and learning comprising mainly familial and community learning; the education system has shown it does not serve the individual. This discussion broadens educational experiences to encompass the reflective process of experience, the learning which is accompanied through existence.

Similarly, our relationship to external technologies, which are there to help us, have turned into our masters. The argument posed by Illich (1973) on tools of conviviality shed light to technological dependency that has created a master-slave relationship, despite the potential of external technology as an enabling tool which in some respects there are components of this. This chapter argues the model around external technology as a consumption tool largely incapacitates its consumers (1973). The technological era is declaring a new 'useless class' of humans, as the discomfort of laborious duties and boredom are transferred over to AI (Harari, 2015). This discussion chapter does not glorify human suffering but highlights the disconnection in technology as a tool for conviviality (Illich, 1973). Technology has largely obscured the reality of suffering, re-writing this narrative with endless entertainment: in this way, technology fails to prepare us to recognise that life is by nature tumultuous, insecure, and impermeable (Watts, 1987). From here stems the awareness of the key stakeholders from non-Western societies that came with a generational knowledge, as discussed by key stakeholder I.4.a:

Now, having worked in Syria, like at the borders and seeing a lot of families, and reflecting on what she did, I don't know how she was that resilient. I don't understand until today, and then, how you make things simple for a child and maybe she did not know all the fancy words of mental health and social integration and this and that, and maybe she had this wisdom and knowledge that maybe comes with disasters. I think there is some sort of knowledge that is not explicit that comes with misery (I.4.a).

Drawing on this dichotomy between mainly Western societies and the rise of technology and comforts that opaque the true chaotic nature of life, and the Global South, which has large sways of people less dependent on technology and service needs, this discussion chapter argues that the learning that comes with suffering and misery has not yet been transferred over to the marketplace in the same way (Varoufakis, 2017). The virtual community observations support this observation. There was a stark difference between members exposed to struggle because of poverty and marginalisation and their adaptability in awkward and uncomfortable settings compared with Western members. In essence, this discussion chapter does not draw on a division of race; but draws a distinction between the collective identity and the individualistic tendency. Thus, this discussion focuses on the few remaining educational experiences that still reside in the personal domain, like learning through challenges (Sennett, 2008; Illich, 1973). This discussion chapter marks an important discussion in the ownership of this learning. To illustrate the point further, key stakeholder 9.I.a describes empowerment as an ‘aura:’

But I think that when you do feel that it’s kind of strength, it’s energy, it’s kind of being focused, but also, a positivity kind of [feeling] around you. I think it’s kind of an aura almost of mostly a good feelings but also being able to deal with difficult feelings or challenges in a way that is not destructive, I suppose. But, yeah, I think that’s how I would see empowerment. And I think it’s about confidence. For me, it would definitely be about confidence. If you’ve got your confidence about feeling high and good, then you kind of feel empowered to take on things (I.9.a).

Furthermore, attributes of confidence and strength are internal qualities, which is seldom received as part of formal schooling (Giroux, 2001; Illich, 1970). Drawing from the scoping review findings, the empowering nature of non-formal education draws a parallel to this internal versus external learning and its capacity to offer spaces for reflection (Shah, 2011). The ability to envision alternative futures through exposure and an embodiment of knowledge has aspects of ancient wisdom, particular to Buddhist and Hindu thought, in the pursuit of truth (M, 2017;

Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013). This discussion fulfils the original contributions to knowledge in the acknowledgement of capabilities of girls and women beyond the current vulnerability paradigm, beginning with the realisation that women are already empowered. Shiva (1999) in a recent interview explains that she has taken issue with the term 'women's empowerment,' arguing that women are already empowered but are up against factors that disempower, such as the formal economy, which is patriarchal (Farouky, 2018). This brings the feminine principle and the masculine principle into the discussion. The findings and analysis of this research do not position one over the other but rather argue for a return to a symbiotic relationship, a state of oneness and balance (Veith, 1949). From a feminist perspective, what has emerged from the findings is the strength within the feminine principle, offering an alternative understanding through ancient wisdom, moving beyond a critique of the patriarchy (Chinnaiyan, 2017; Shiva, 1999).

9.4 Uncertainty and Danger

In the discussion around uncertainty and danger, the key stakeholders in stage method one and three were not in search of a happy ever after. The narratives of my grandmother's and mother's experiences were filled with life's harsh realities, experiences that served as a great anecdotal comedy for the family. The happiness that I was exposed to was never absent from pain. I was introduced to this pedagogy through family gatherings, storytelling, music, and laughter; life was always hard, and the matriarchs of the family never hid that away from us. We were to feel proud about overcoming such challenges and to learn from those experiences so that we would not be caught off guard: '*Soldado avisado no muere en Guerra,*' (a warned soldier does not die in war.) Such was the prose that would colour our days as grandmother would recount her stories; life is uncertain and impermanent (Wright and Jayawickrama, 2020; Jayawickrama, 2018; Kleinman, 2006, 1995). The stories of the key stakeholders in their engagements flowed in line with this pedagogy on life. There were no surprises about the uncertainty of life or danger they experienced. What did emerge, however, was a reflective process that they engaged with at various points. They reflected on their family's ability to

withstand such challenges, but they never felt cheated, or betrayed, or resentful about such bitter experiences. An important anchor in the lives of the non-Western key stakeholders was religion and spirituality; this was a key finding as they discussed their faith as a protection and strength.

I would be blaming maybe it was because I was an orphan and didn't have a mother; all of those [thoughts] as you go, you find other people with different situations, even those with mothers and fathers who have everything. And then you say ah no, that is not the cause: maybe that's pre-planned and of course I am a Christian, maybe that is what the plan [was] God had arranged. And when I see now, I am successful despite of all this. I started primary school, I find myself, many people admiring me, admiring where I am, what I am doing, so I find that was not an issue (I.5.a).

Despite the different religious and spiritual affiliations, the key stakeholders discussed in broad terms their church community and faith as a form of support system or buffer that guarded and protected them. The research findings and analysis chapter expose a difference in the Western atheist key stakeholder and her battles with depression, taking a professional, scientific approach through counselling to manage those life challenges in contrast to those that relied on faith and spirituality. The findings and analysis showed that a professionalised approach lacked duration, whilst religion and spirituality were an internal process that continued to expand, promoting self-discovery and empowerment. An essential discussion point in understanding uncertainty and danger is that from a non-Western perspective, the focus was not to obscure this fact but to live with it in humility, gratitude, and perseverance. The Disney complex of the 'happy ever after' was not played out on the part of the non-Western women; this perhaps is one of the most visible distinctions between Western pedagogy and non-Western. A point must be made to clarify that non-Western key stakeholders strive for joy, bliss and peace but understand that life's challenges are part of the landscape. Similarly, the virtual communities provide an interesting backdrop of mainly Western representatives of INGOs that see money and funding as a means to an end to the plight of women's suffering. Furthermore, the presentation of the Western concept of love and happiness can be captured effectively in the romantic narratives in

Disney movies. The magical, unrealistic nature of a 'happy ever after' that results in a princess being rescued or in love with a wealthy prince overcomes suffering forever (Hine et al., 2018, p.161). However, in the non-Western traditional storytelling like in Ancient Mayan and Aztec societies, victory, joy and bliss are to be found in the preservation of the tribe, regardless of an individual's plight (Townsend, 2019).

9.5 Empowerment

Linking the aim and objectives of this thesis in its critical examination of mainstream and non-mainstream pedagogy, the fundamental underpinning of the research findings stems ultimately from the concepts of liberation and enslavement. Illich in *Tools of Conviviality* (1973, p.11), which draws on an emerging methodology, argues:

People need not only to obtain things, they need above all the freedom to make things among which they can love, to give shape to them according to their own tastes and to put them to use in caring for and about others.

Similarly, empowerment is not the destination but rather, like peace, empowerment is a quality. As shown by the autoethnographic account and the key stakeholder engagements, empowerment becomes an attribute that you develop which in its operationalisation expands. Therefore, it is not a question of being empowered as the findings and analysis of the research have shown, but rather of whether you have engaged in a reflective process of realising your empowerment and the subsequent ownership that continues thereafter. Taking this core understanding of empowerment on a community and societal level, as shown in the virtual community observations, it enables a society to expand aspects of their wellbeing and calls on individual responsibility (Sadhguru, 2021).

9.5.1 Expressions of Empowerment

The findings and analysis of this research have not resulted in a tight definition of empowerment, but rather its ontological and epistemological

understanding has resulted in a qualitative account of the various expressions of empowerment, as shown in Figure 35. Contrary to the Western development discourse, which attaches a quantifiable element to empowerment through metrics closely attached to projects, initiatives, programmes and funding agendas, empowerment is largely qualitative (Richardson, 2018). This discussion chapter argues that in its attempt to empower women, the ownership of commercial empowerment based on a Western metric influenced by Western thinking has been imposed on non-Western women and societies lacking any form of meaningful engagement (Cornwall, 2007). Rather, the summative findings support the multidimensional quality that involves empowerment as an internal process (Page and Czuba, 1999). This chapter further argues that external parties cannot own empowerment; it cannot be bought or sold, rendering it free from a market economy (Freire, 1972). The Euro-American discussion around empowerment focuses on the external that has steep ties within the marketplace. Due to this external drive, this thesis argues that external empowerment is secondary, and although the ability for the external to influence the internal is not rejected, the absence of internal empowerment has rendered the external element as useless. This thesis does not reject the external empowerment, but rather the relevance of employment, the practice and purity of religion and spirituality, friendships and love centred around Nussbaum's capabilities approach (2000) are discussed concerning the expansion of human dignity and development. In addition, the expansion of creativity and fullness of being are also explored through Illich's (1973) discussion of tools of conviviality.

By rejecting a universal definition learning and empowerment are not constricted to an institutional experience. Drawing from the narrative literature review's findings, discovery, and the pedagogy of embodiment of knowledge and experience can help shape a broader understanding of how to facilitate creativity (Illich, 1973). Woven into these accounts of *bravery, inclusivity, forms of quality, not knowingness* lies humility, which results from an acknowledgement of impermanence (Chinnaiyan, 2017; Kumar, 2000). In addition to the discussion on the feminine principle, which is represented in the bravery of presence and

authenticity, this chapter discusses how public opinion matters less in the process of empowerment. Thus, Nietzsche arrives at Kierkegaard's idea that "the crowd is untruth." The so-called autonomous, self-legislating individual is nothing but a herd animal who has trained itself to be docile and unfree by conforming to the "universal" standards of morality (Crowell, 2020; Hannay, 2012).

Liberation and enslavement were discussed as the key stakeholders oscillated between these two states (as captured in the research findings); as they acquire a sense of authenticity and a deeper understanding of self, they connected further with the feminine principle in their different ways. There was no herd mentality displayed by the key stakeholders. Their expressions of empowerment point largely to an inclusive identity and with this inclusivity, the key stakeholders practice the art of care (Kleinman, 2020, 2006, 1995). The discussion around the key stakeholders' empowerment shows that they have strived for authenticity and have not conformed, further supporting the scoping and narrative literature review findings in envisioning alternative futures (Kariyawasam, 2014; Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013).

Through an existentialist lens and the work of Kierkegaard and then Nietzsche, one can elucidate an aspect of *being* that can neither be understood through immediate drives and inclinations nor the universal law of behaviour (Crowell, 2020; Hannay, 2012; Nietzsche, 1924). Moreover, this becomes part of the crux of the thesis when discussing the strength and vigour which lies in the feminine principle, like the Chipko concept (Shiva, 1999). The quantifiable approach to empowerment leads to an objective inventory of *what I am* but does not capture the *way of being*, which evokes a deep level of engagement and equal partnership to understand fully (Wright and Jayawickrama, 2020; Lindekens and Jayawickrama, 2019; Jayawickrama, 2018; Jayawickrama, 2013).

9.6 Contradictions

The previous discussion on the expressions of empowerment highlights what can appear to be a set of contradictions. Drawing from the findings and

analysis, the results show an oscillation like approach to the various expressions of empowerment as shown in figure 35.

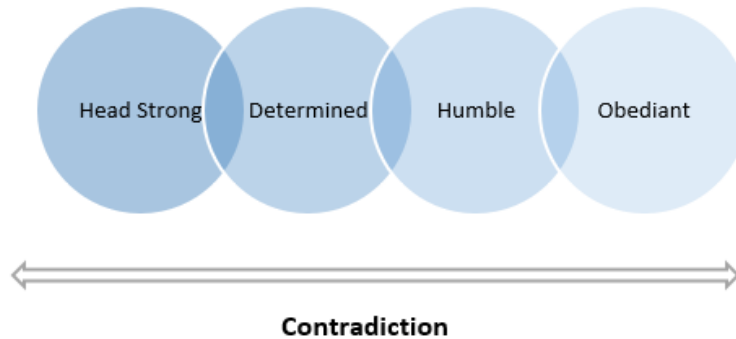


Figure 34 Apparent contradictions in the journey to empowerment

For example, as shown in Figure 35, bravery, confidence, and authenticity were characteristics of empowerment, but at the same time, so were inclusivity, obedience, and humility. Therefore, the positioning of the discussion on empowerment, and the phenomena of education and wellbeing, which are interlinked, are not set out in a progressive linear metric but rather an oscillating movement, as shown in Figure 35. Similarly, the key stakeholders in the various stage methods moved between various complex positionalities. This was influenced by variations in cultural, social, political, economic, gender stereotypes, sexual orientation and religious experiences that swayed the key stakeholders to act with fluidity, thus appearing contradictory. As discussed in the findings and analysis of the research, many of the key stakeholders are fervent feminists, but at the same time, they are not conflicted between their feminist views and traditional roles, like mothering. In the participant observations, the members representing women's rights organisations oscillated between humility and directness in their approach. Furthermore, this oscillation is also noted in myself and that of my grandmother and mother, where obedience and being headstrong are applied in conjunction with one another.

In addition, one of the points to expand on when discussing what can appear to be a contradiction is that empowerment is not discussed as a linear progression but cyclical. This links the findings back to the narrative literature review; thus, the notion of oneness is central to understanding empowerment and it being facilitated (Ngomane, 2019; Zulu, 2018; Khomba, 2011; Rinpoche, 2008; Henning, 2002).

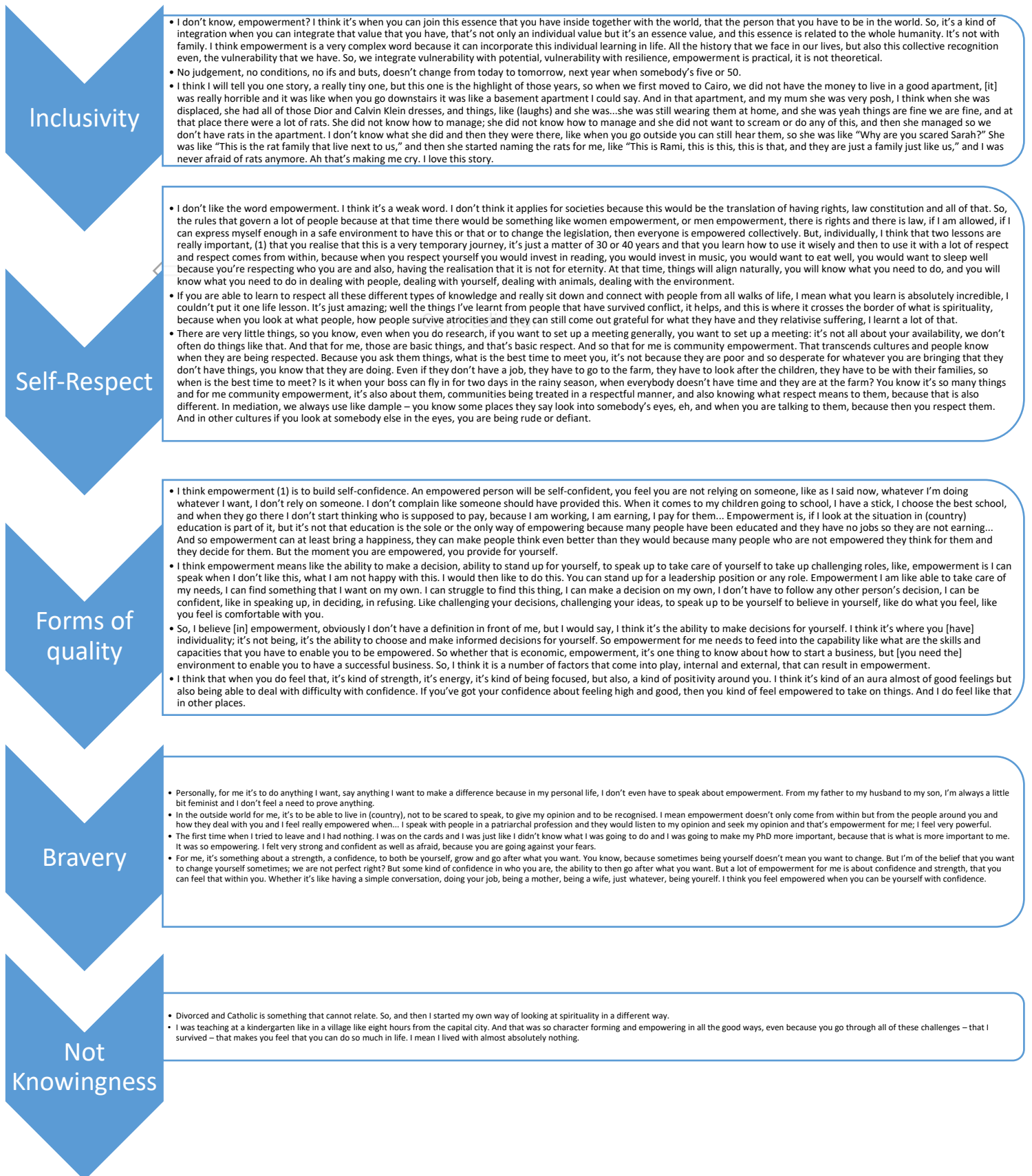


Figure 35 Expressions of empowerment.

9.7 Emulating the Inclusivity of the Elephant

The women in this research are linked by their operationalisation of compassion and care. Further to this care, which is a theme in the research findings, is the expansion of such inclusivity. This is the love that one feels for family, siblings, and friends, which is usually tightly kept for those who are privileged in your inner circle, a circle that needs to be expanded (Sadhguru, 2021; Ngomane, 2019; Rinpoche, 2008; Henning, 2002).

Firstly, drawing from autoethnography, the motivating factor for my mother to immigrate was because of her motherly love. This is ultimately what is argued in this chapter as a *choice*. Therefore, to be inclusive and decide to love falls on inclusion. By applying an ancient African philosophical lens to the discussion of inclusivity, the African proverb of 'I see you,' is deceptive in its simplicity, but on close examination unravels the deepness of this principle (Ngomane, 2019). Growing up in a matriarchal family after my mother left Colombia, influenced my son's upbringing as he experienced being raised by the many women in my family and having multiple mothers. There are therefore parallels to the matriarchal nature of the elephant herd that is led by the strongest, wisest female elephant (Ogden and New Scientist, 2014). In the matriarchal governance of elephant families, the female elephants comprise aunts, sisters, cousins, and daughters, all sharing the calves and all mothers, emphasising this unity and oneness that is so natural to these giants (Ogden and New Scientist, 2014). In this care and inclusion, what also needs to be noted is the elephant's ferocity, which is largely underestimated when discussing the feminine principle and demonstrates the complexity and fluidity of femininity, which again goes against the normative Western paradigm of vulnerability (Mitra, 1993).

Many of the key stakeholders through the three-method process reported being caregivers and working in caring professions. Furthermore, many of the direct experiences of inclusion from the non-Western key stakeholders were through motherhood. Thus, it is from the premise of inclusion that one can disentangle care. De Beauvoir (1948) argues from an existentialist perspective that the individual

person is a free and responsible agent who determines their own development through acts of the will. In this same vein, when discussing inclusivity and care, this discussion chapter argues that it is through this freedom to act that one incorporates the feminine principle – a non-gender-based ideology (Chinnaiyan, 2017). De Beauvoir (1948) addresses a further point, discussing freedom as intertwined with the freedom of others. From a feminist perspective, she argues that “A freedom which is interested only in denying freedom must be denied” (Crowell, 2020). Besides the explicit remark of the oppression imposed by a patriarchal society, and although De Beauvoir does not explicitly discuss care, oppression is the result of a trade between care and inclusivity for an efficiency model (Kleinman, 2017).

9.8 Pre-existing Traits and Formal Education

As this discussion ends, there remains a vital component to the empowerment discourse, and to wellbeing. The pre-existing traits of an individual and its inclusion in mainstream education is a link between education, empowerment and wellbeing. The research through its three-method process has not claimed that there is a uniformity attributed to Western and non-Western women. Rather, the findings draw on the shared commonalities with women folk despite their complex social, political, and cultural contexts (Seeberg, 2014; Shah, 2011b). These pre-existing traits that belong to the individual are instigators to our individual journey to empowerment and its direction. Drawing from the autoethnographic account, and despite the commonalities between my grandmother, mother, and myself, we all share different pre-existing traits. This is reflected in our adventure-seeking nature, our sedentary nature, or creative and inquisitive traits, despite our relation. The key stakeholder engagements gave rise to a visible space for the analysis of each key stakeholder’s pre-existing traits, resulting in the findings that individualism and collectivism run through both Western and non-Western people in different degrees and in different contexts and supporting the uniqueness of empowerment.

The expansion of Western mainstream education developed alongside the industrial revolution in a bid to exclude ignorance and superstition (Carl, 2009). In this way, the foundation of global mainstream education was designed with a clear intention to serve for efficiency purposes modelled by the factory model as shown in Figure 36 (Giroux, 2001). Furthermore, as discussed in the scoping review findings, the premise of formal education is based largely on learners' deficit of knowledge (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2019). The premise of ignorance is an important finding as it naturally suggests a discriminative stance expressed by a position of power and authority of the teacher. The student enters the classroom like an empty vessel that needs filling with knowledge. In this model, there is no co-learning, but more importantly the informal learning and pre-existing traits are not factored in (Brown and Samuel, 2013; Illich, 1978, 1970; Freire, 1972; Rodney, 1972).

Thus, this mini literature review on education, professionalism and learning argues that the inception of formal education and wage-dependency work is coercive and designed to eliminate self-sufficiency (Brown and Samuel, 2013). Since the 19th century factory model of education, there has been little change to its fundamental structures. Education continues to compartmentalise learning, with students sitting down at their desks and rigidly set government curricula (Kwon, 2002). The exploration of those pre-existing traits is important in connecting with the empowerment of women and girls (Nussbaum, 2000, 1997). A solely feminist and Marxist critique on education and inequality presents a limited lens to look beyond schools and jobs for success metrics. The inequalities caused by the implementation of global mainstream education have spilt over into the workplace negatively impacting on gender; thus, in this critique through a Feminist and Marxists lens, care and the commitment of motherhood are also looked at through a patriarchal market economy lens, commoditising care (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, 2019; Brown and Samuel, 2013). Consequently, this associates the ideals of liberation and freedom with wage-dependency (Brown and Samuel, 2013), by failing to broaden the scope to the creativity and self-sufficiency that are overlooked in non-Western industrial societies (Farouky, 2018; Shiva, 1999; Illich et

al., 1977). The findings from the scoping review and the narrative literature review discuss human liberation as a unique process through learning beyond the external structures; this is the core to the Hindu, Buddhist, and Daoist teachings (M, 2018 2017 2012; Kariyawasam, 2014; Mahathera, 1998; Vivekananda, 1989; Veith, 1949).

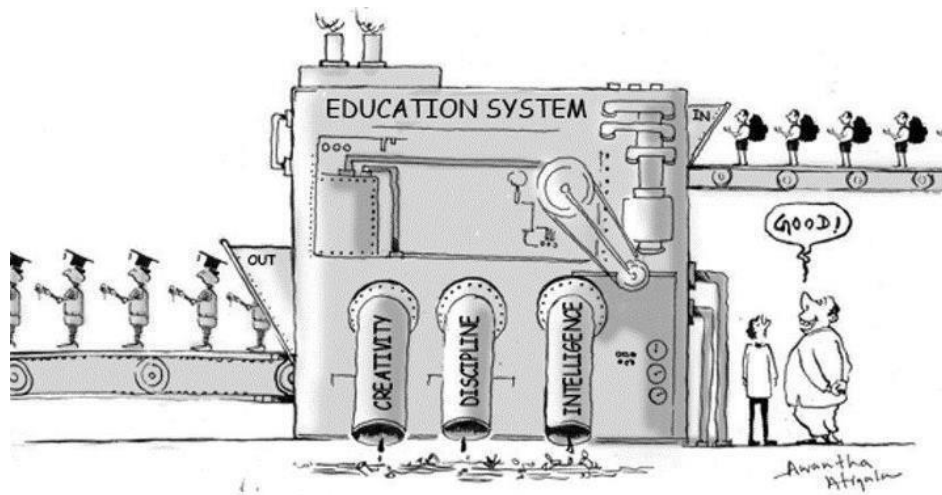


Figure 36 The factory model of education (Source: *Revise Sociology*, 2017).

Following Illich's (1973) argument that Western societies are overdeveloped, this mini literature review further discusses the wellbeing and health implications that come from this overdevelopment. Drawing from the narrative literature review's findings, consumerism is examined as an illness. The symptom of an ill-mind fails to conceive internal balance but needs distraction and entertainment (M, 2018, 2017, 2012; Fung Key, 2011; Niwano, 1989; Vivekananda, 1989; Watts, 1987). This sets the premise for the recommendations and a proposed framework that sculpts a unique approach for the facilitation of empowerment through learning. As argued by Freire (1972), a higher consciousness through education is defined as levels of consciousness and action that produce potential for change at one or more socio-eco-systemic levels (Jemal, 2017). A question emerges from the literature examination of education and empowerment: *where does it all go wrong?* The narrative literature review findings refer to the inception and creation mythologies (Vivekananda, 1989); in a similar manner, if we examine the state of a young child free from judgement, we can understand that children are joyful by nature (Michaeleen Doucleff, 2021). What begins to emerge from the

literature examination is a conscious co-learning experience between the learner and the facilitator. The natural purpose for any education system is the continuation and preservation of societies (Rodney, 1972). Allowing the exploration of fulfilment and convivial societies (Illich, 1973). From here stems the discussion around health and wellbeing which has become ever more relevant during the pandemic (Milam, 2021; Pandya, 2020; The World Bank, 2020). The effects of wage-dependency are one part of a much larger picture, that needs to be understood in relation to fulfilment, purpose and presence (Kleinman, 2017b). It is here the Western concept of *professionalism* arises from, the discouragement of presence and inclusion of diversity in teaching and work (Marom, 2018). Furthermore, the findings from the three-method process show that societal structures that are hierarchal are restrictive and support mechanisms of bondage, better understood as a rat race. In this way, restrictive mechanisms that favour efficiency over conviviality, professional vocation, caring engagements, presence, and involvement are largely inextricably removed (Eenwyk, 2001). This can be largely attributed to the compartmentalisation of education, where organic co-learning is replaced by competitiveness and individualism (Giroux, 2001; Ross et al., 2018). Furthermore, in the literature examination on presence and care, what is apparent is the strength of the feminine principle, a critical consciousness that awakes in understanding the interconnectedness of person and universal consciousness (M, 2018, 2017, 2012). The discussion chapter has elaborated on the research findings regarding fluidity, movement, and suppleness between different states, which is closely associated with the feminine energy, that of creation or *Shakti* (Farouky, 2018; Chinnaiyan, 2017; Shiva, 1999).

Professionalism has been defined by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) as the demonstration of: “commitment to carrying out professional responsibilities and an adherence to ethical principles “(Zaidi et al., 2021). The definition establishes boundaries of responsibilities, duty, and work, which restrain deep human interaction of deep listening or intensely indicating that the person and their story matter (Kleinman, 2017a). From this divisive approach to professionalism lies judgement that disables people from being able to connect and

find fulfilment in the deepest human manner beyond monetary remuneration (Illich, 1978).

The title to the thesis, 'Beyond Schools and Jobs: How Can Education Empower Women and Girls to "Become?"' covers empowerment, learning and wellbeing first and foremost for the benefit of the person in their journey to becoming, whilst, modern-day adaptations of yoga, meditation, and mindfulness, and concepts of meaning like *ikigai* (a reason for being), are adapted for the preservation of a market economy. People are encouraged to meditate and have a work-life balance to continue to do more of what is making them sick. Similarly, this tool is being absorbed into the market economy for the survival of the market (Illich et al., 1977; Illich, 1973). Figure 37 shows the Japanese concept of *ikigai*, that can be roughly translated as 'reason for being;' such a word and concept does not exist in the limited English language. The Operationalisation of *ikigai* is presented in Figure 37 and explained in its various dimensions (Dyjack, 2020). Studies show that love has a substantial impact on health; Ornish (2020) co-authored a study at Yale University involving 119 men and 40 women who underwent coronary angiography. Those who had *ikigai* and felt most loved and supported had substantially fewer blockages in their hearts than other subjects (Yasukawa et al., 2018). Subsequently, *ikigai*, like tools of conviviality (Illich, 1973), point to methodologies of boundary-pushing concepts that reclaim and develop those pre-existing traits discussed in this chapter.

Ikigai

A JAPANESE CONCEPT MEANING "A REASON FOR BEING"

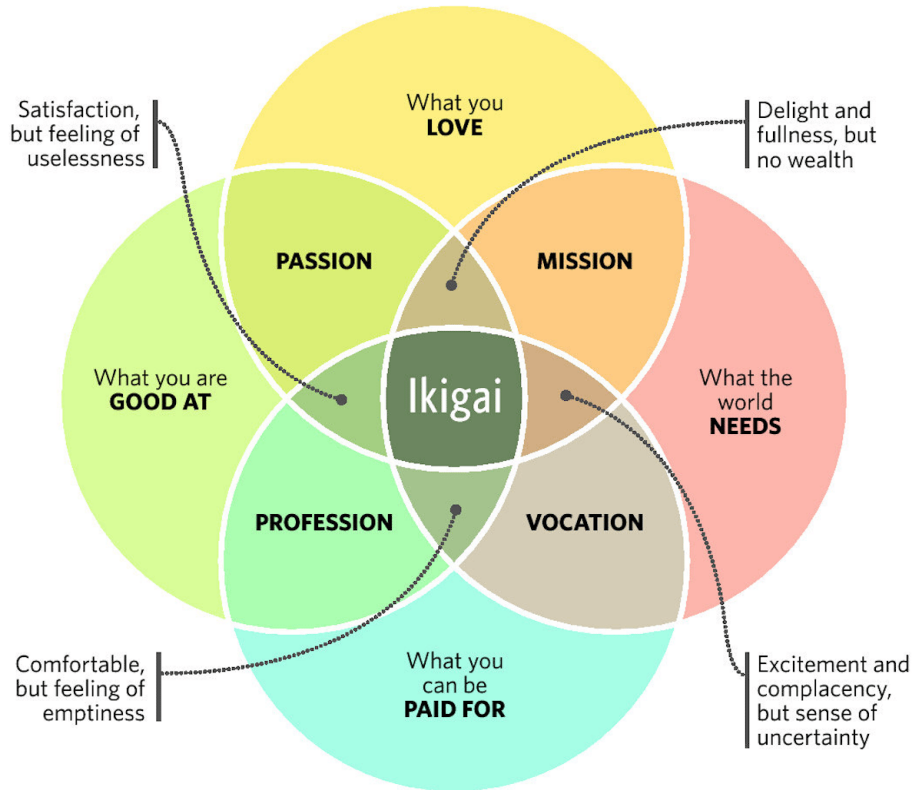


Figure 37 Ikigai, the Japanese concept of fulfilment (Source: Dreamtime).

9.9 Recommendations

9.9.1 Tools of Education to Facilitate Empowerment

This discussion chapter, which is subsequently followed by a recommendations section and conclusion chapter, outline complex concepts that co-arise. Figure 38 captures the discussion chapter in a summary form that encompasses the emergence of a proposed framework designed to bring attitudinal change through tool building and critical pedagogy.

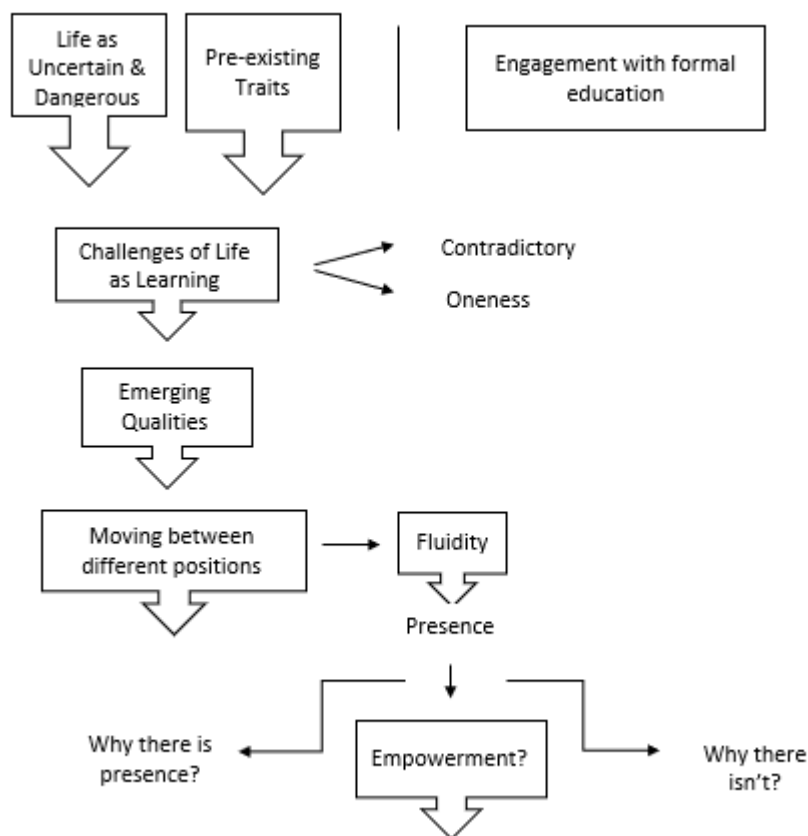


Figure 38 The journey to empowerment.

9.10 Introduction to the Proposed Framework

Although the current findings substantiate the proposed framework in the recommendations section, the mini literature review conducted further strengthens the scoping review and narrative literature findings on the fragmentation of mainstream education. As a result, from the research findings and due to the activity and busyness of women folk, the proposed framework is adaptable to consider the importance of reflective space as intrinsic to both the facilitator and the learner engaging in any process of empowerment (Shah, 2011a). The findings from the scoping review, narrative literature review, and research findings establish reflection, introspection, and experience as pedagogies that facilitate empowerment (M, 2017, 2012; Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013; Shah,

2011; Vivekananda, 1989; Freire, 1972). Drawing from the autoethnographic account on my journey to empowerment, if it were not for the reflective space facilitated by undergoing this PhD and the pedagogy used, I would not have engaged deeply with the stories of my grandmother and mother to allow me to recognise their empowerment as intertwined with my own. Similarly, the key stakeholder engagements provided a space for the key stakeholders to engage with their own stories in a reflective manner.

This framework is a call back to the feminine principle, which draws on the ability to engage from within. Thus, the first stage in engaging with any transformative tool is self-reflection. Similarly, the facilitator enters a reflective process to understand those pre-existing traits and mentors through a multidimensional process that is adaptable for the suppleness and fluid nature of one's existence.

In discussing the feasibility to implement the lotus framework this introduction section examines other frameworks that have been implemented and are policy relevant. The Covid-19 pandemic was a catalyst that connected the ministries of education and health in a first in over 20 African countries (UNICEF, 2021). The relevance to the pandemic and the impact that it had on a global level substantiates the need for health to be re-positioned back into our education system. The dialogue between these two ministries has been slowly eroded by the intentional marginalisation of informal education, traditional knowledge system and ancient wisdom due to colonial projects (Rodney, 1972). From the outset, this framework has not been designed to perpetuate the systematic failures that are present in our current mainstream education and health system. Rather, it looks at working with teacher training, humanitarian aid workers, and those in the caring professions that include the health industry. These large industries have HR (human resource) departments, trainings, and educational programmes already in place which can absorb and adapt a proposed framework like the Lotus framework. The framework is not directed at affected communities, women, learners, or patients as this thesis argues that the issue around empowerment lies with the caregiver and a misplaced engagement due to a top-down approach to learning and health (Illich,

1970). Rodney and implicitly perhaps Franz Fanon Paulo Freire have all contributed in their own way to innovative frameworks. The innovation in this framework proposed is the focus it has on women which sets it apart from previous scholarly work. One of the first stages of the framework draws on the Guru-Shishya Parampara, an ancient Indian education system. The term guru-shishya Parampara relates to a particular relationship between a teacher (Guru) and the student (Shishya). The first stage the framework establishes a teacher student evaluation phase that does not take for granted the matching process between the two. This ancient Indian education system followed a multidisciplinary model that promoted critical thinking as well as the education of the heart, body, and soul (Behl and Pattiaratchi, 2023). Mentorship and the encouragement of the facilitator for reflection, grounded on concepts of care, humility and co-learning are also found in the guru-shishya Parampara. In this, the ability for this framework to stimulate new lineages – the creative and empowerment phase is due to the close-knit relationship established at the beginning between facilitator and learner.

9.10.1 The Proposed Framework

The lotus framework as shown in Figure 39, has a five-stage process that details the relationship between the facilitator and the learner. The framework is an intimate process that draws on the research findings regarding the relevance of consistent reflexivity, spaces for co-creation of knowledge and introspection, all which are self-transformative practices that embody empowerment (Kariyawasam, 2014; Popova, 2014; Watts, 1987). This framework signals a departure from external processes, requiring the facilitator to shift in mindset. There are several aspects to this framework that are encouraging regarding its potential feasibility and implementation into diverse settings. The first is that the lotus framework is not new or unique in presenting an internal process with an emphasis in self-reflection and co-creation of knowledge. Otto Scharmer, a senior lecturer at Massachusetts Institute of technology (MIT) developed a methodological management concept that could be adapted to any system, organisation, institution community or family setting. Theory U is a process of change and transformation that transitions one from an ego to eco-thinking to solve social,

political and environmental problems that society faces (U-school, 2021). Theory U's core concepts are *presencing* and a flow for co-creation. This theory has proven to be successful, useful, and feasible in implementing, which is an encouraging case study that supports the further development and dissemination of the lotus framework. Other, concepts, and frameworks that are within the education field is the work of Krishnamurti and Tagore who have founded schools that are grounded in harmonious ideologies, like 'education of the heart' (Patel, 2021). The core of these educational frameworks from Krishnamurti focused on the formation of the learner in their entirety, ensuring that education was a facilitator for the development of a healthy, balanced, and wholesome human being (Krishnamurti, 2000). Lastly, the framework proposed by Dr Anusanthee Pillay, emphasised humility and authentic relationships as central concepts within her humanitarian framework (Pillay, 2021).

The implementation of the lotus framework can be approached through facilitator trainings and in person workshops. There is scope for a future book on the framework in a bid to influence policy makers and inter-governmental organisations that work and coordinate development, health and empowerment programmes. The Lotus framework is not limited to a classroom setting but can be adapted to anyone taking on a caring role, whether it be within the teaching, humanitarian, clinical or development sectors. The adaptability of the framework gives a greater use to its operationalisation. The framework does not claim to be a finished product but the blueprint that can be further adapted, modified, and improved depending on the context. The framework looks at the key stages to the facilitation of empowerment incorporating the findings from the scoping review, narrative literature review and research findings, and the pedagogical approach to this PhD. In this way, the proposed framework has bridged theory and practice, and is further discussed in the conclusion chapter. The diagram as shown in Figure 39 uses the lotus flower as a background. The lotus flower is one of the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism; it is used profusely in Buddhist art and literature. The Buddha's teachings refer to a fully blooming lotus flower as a symbol of enlightenment (Peters, 2021). From an empowerment lens, the lotus flower

blossoms in murky waters and the mud nourishes its roots. The key findings in this chapter discuss the significance of suffering as a human experience. Similarly, like the lotus flower, the key stakeholders who participated in this research have bloomed despite the circumstances. To rise above the mud requires the determination, faith and perseverance that is displayed in all the key stakeholder narratives. What remains central to the symbolism of the lotus flower is that it exists in its muddy waters, untouched. This is an important element that feeds into the overall purpose of the proposed framework, which culminates in the ability to operationalise knowledge to live with joy despite the external suffering that surrounds human existence.

Just like a red, blue, or white lotus – born in the water, grown in the water, rising up above the water – stands unsmearred by the water, in the same way I – born in the world, grown in the world, having overcome the world – live unsmearred by the world. Remember me, Brahman, as ‘awakened.’ (Anguttara Nikaya 4.36, Pali Tripitika).

[Thanissaro Bhikkhu translation]

Positioning the proposed framework against the symbolism and philosophical significance of the lotus flower situates empowerment away from an economical model and external markers, giving ownership back to the learner.

9.10.2 Assessment for Teaching

The first section to the proposed framework shows a semi-independent reflective process of the facilitator before embarking on a facilitator and learner relationship. As shown in Figure 39, this first stage uses a cyclical diagram at the onset of the process, which suggests the option for the facilitator to remove themselves after assessing their suitability. The suitability of the facilitator in this framework is questioned, which goes largely against modern mainstream practice. In this way, the framework establishes a relationship based on humility, which does not take for granted the expertise of the facilitator. This approach supports the overall critique in this PhD of formal mainstream education, looking at the structures that maintain the inequalities endured largely by non-Western women from an uneven development context. This proposed framework shifts the power

imbalance and establishes a grounding in humility, with the intention for the learner to outgrow the need for a facilitator.

The proposed framework establishes a conscious commitment from the start for both the facilitator and learner and places the responsibility on the facilitator. The applicability, relevance, and usefulness of the education system, curriculum, teachers, and institution go largely unquestioned, placing the onus on the learner, which legitimises the scrutiny and judgement placed on the learner (Giroux, 2001; Freire, 1972; Illich, 1970). Following this approach, the question that emerges is whether the facilitator is appropriate and matches the process. This is supported by the narrative literature review findings on ancient wisdom, which details the dialectical play between student and teacher. Not every teacher is able to teach every student (M, 2017, 2012). This draws on presence, engagement, and deep listening, and that sense that there needs to be a deep relationship of co-learning that tears down the barriers of professionalism allowing care to emerge (Kleinman, 2017a). Furthermore, the premise of hierarchy, which is so engrained in formal Western education and is the basis on which education is modelled, becomes disrupted. The research findings clearly show the relationship between hierarchy, strict curriculum, and disabling professions that follow the same model and disempower (Shah, 2011; Giroux, 2001; Nussbaum, 1997; Illich, 1970).

9.10.3 Space and Freedom for Experience

The second stage of the proposed framework shown in Figure 39 marks the beginning of the learning relationship and the facilitation process. This stage is another semi-independent process, but one that is essential to learning and is depicted inside of the cycle as an integral part of the process. Even though this stage is for the learner, it is guided by the facilitator, marking the first essential teaching by the facilitator. The pedagogical approach to this second stage is grounded in the research findings and draws from the scoping and narrative literature review findings, promoting a reflective approach to self-enquiry. This stage promotes a space that allows the learner to experiment and experience different pockets of knowledge conducive to a greater critical consciousness (Freire, 1972). This relates to findings from the scoping review regarding the importance of

social capital, confidence, relationship building and exposure to imagine alternative futures that require a delicate dialectical play between the learner and facilitator, mainly found in non-formal and informal education settings (Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013; Shah, 2011). By giving priority to this stage, the proposed framework re-positions education for within as primary, de-commoditising educational experiences and drawing from the concept of tools for conviviality (Illich, 1973). In addition, this stage also incorporates ancient wisdom and takes the learner closer to answering the “Who am I really?” Any subsequent engagement with knowledge is encompassed in a self-reflective framework of empowerment (M, 2017, 2012).

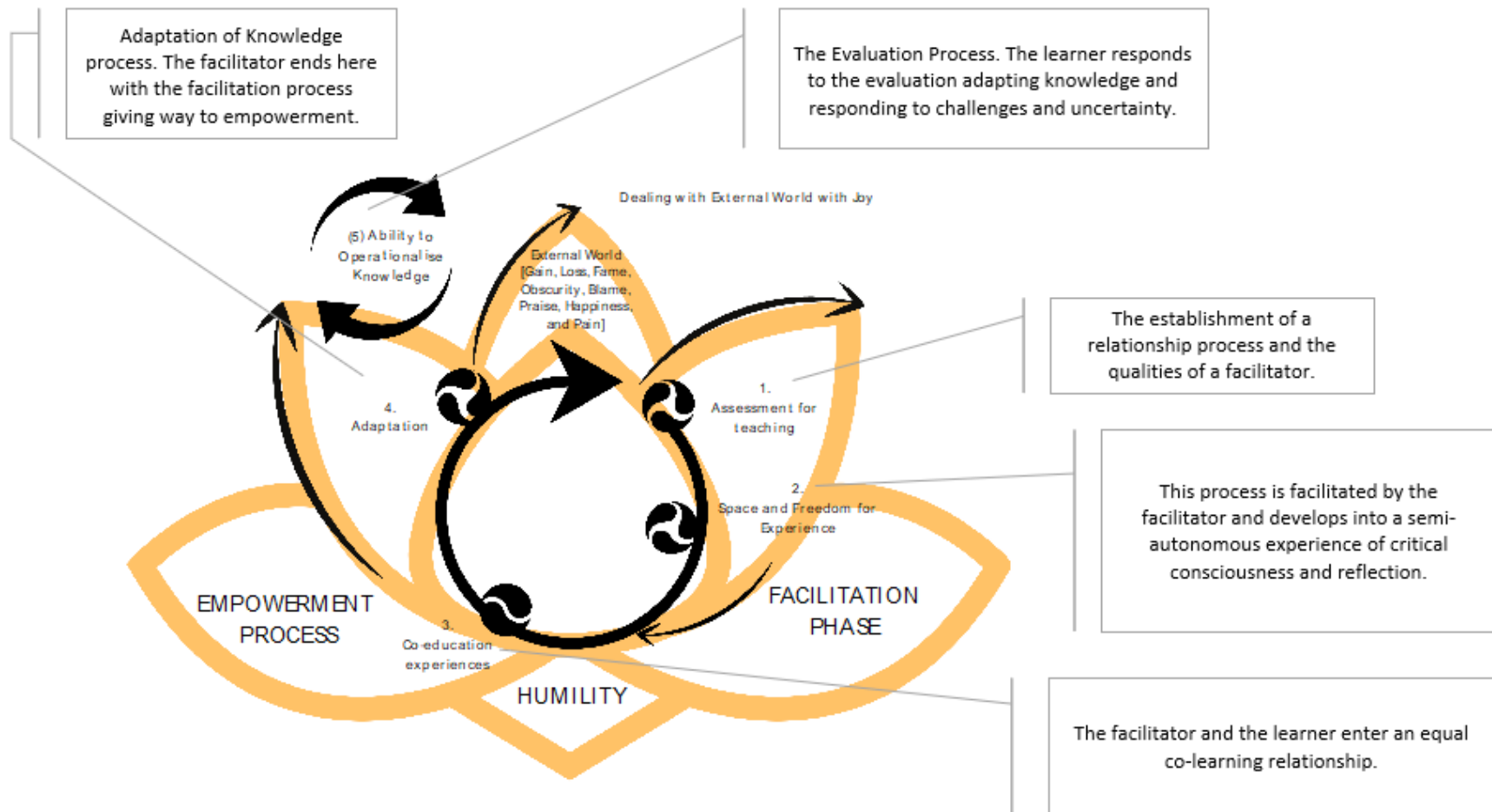


Figure 39 The Lotus Framework to facilitate empowerment.

Much of the critique by Illich (1970) on schooling relates to the transfer of knowledge by the expert, prompting an imbalance, and subjugation to memorising. This unnatural adaptation to learning, which is irrelevant in many ways to the context, interest, and relevance of the learner draw the person further away from communal bonds, segregating educated from uneducated (Rodney, 1972). Furthermore, this recommendations section argues that in the abstract space of education, there is a limited ability for the learner to create according to their individual vision. Instead of leading with the feminine principle, which represents the multiplicity of creation, most learners become cogs in the wheel/mechanics of a much larger system.

9.10.4 Co-educational Experiences

The third stage establishes a co-learning process that uses a similar iconography to the yin and yang Chinese philosophical concept of the complementary and interconnectedness of opposite forces (Veith, 1949). This stage shows the facilitator and learner are separate yet can enter a state of co-learning. This stage is the outcome of a conscious commitment from the facilitator and a guided process of self-reflection that culminates with the freedom to visualise alternative futures, and the embodiment of knowledge through a mentor approach to teaching (M, 2018, 2017, 2012; Kariyawasam, 2014; Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013; Fung Key, 2011). The depiction of this stage is embedded within the cycle, suggesting an equal positioning between both, something that goes against the position of power and authority established by teachers, and those in professions, as in the healthcare system (Kleinman, 2006).

9.10.5 Adaptation of Knowledge

The proposed framework argues for a change in relations between teacher and student, and advocates for both to walk side by side as they both embark on a learning experience: there is sense of motion in the framework, which is attributed to the concept of empowerment and self-discovery. The framework displays an open circle, that establishes a pronounced point of departure. This opening or

rather the spin-off begins with the adaptation of a knowledge phase, that prepares both the learner and facilitator for the departure point, where the success of the facilitator is marked by his or her redundancy. To a great extent, the proposed framework marks an important diversion from traditional educational models that require fuels a dependency on the teacher (Illich, 1978, 1970; Illich et al., 1977). Thus, the framework itself has been crafted to represent principles of non-attachment and self-governance (Kariyawasam, 2014; Fung Key, 2011; Mahathera, 1998). Furthermore, the adaptation of knowledge is the creative element and mastery of art that is lacking in a system that accredits repetitive learning (Sennett, 2008). Considering the climate emergencies, disparity of wealth, and increase in health emergencies as with the Covid-19 pandemic, the proposed framework introduces a new lens for facilitators to engage in teaching in a manner that allows the facilitators to learn from the student in a humble and interconnected manner.

9.10.6 Ability to Operationalise Knowledge

The final stage of the proposed framework draws on the findings from the scoping review: highlighting the missing pedagogical approaches to mainstream education, such as relevance, usefulness, and adaptability (Raj et al., 2019; Seeberg, 2014; Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013; Shah, 2016, 2011). The issue of empowering pedagogy is not a Western versus non-Western issue. As established in the research findings, mainstream education has disempowered students throughout all societies in different ways. The imposition of knowledge and absence of self-discovery can be felt across different societies in different degrees depending on the political, social, economic, and cultural settings. In the absence of rampant poverty, modernity with its comforts cushion the fragmentation of mainstream education, although in times of disaster and conflict its shortcomings are become visible like during the Covid-19 pandemic (Islam et al., 2021; The Economist, 2021; Pandya, 2020). The significance of self-discovery within the context of the lotus framework as depicted in stage five is the ability for new solutions, approaches, worldviews, and creative processes to emerge. This stage is depicted by an independent cycle for the learner that marks a fully-fledged

empowerment process without a facilitator. In many ways, this is the beginning of a lifelong and life-wide independent process (Giroux, 2001). Stage five affirms the importance of wellbeing, joy and empowerment as an internal process independent of external circumstances (Rinpoche, 2008). This is a contrary to modern notions of happiness that are attached to the capitalist system of consumerism and individualism.

In this proposed framework, self-governance is at the forefront. The capitalist system runs on dependency and attachment which contravene the principles of ancient wisdom and philosophy. In the marketplace, you are rewarded on success, based on the need for your services, encouraging people to create a greater demand. This framework challenges all principles of the marketplace and reclaims a sense of freedom and liberation for both the facilitator and learner.

9.11 Conclusion

To conclude, the discussion and recommendations chapter explains that women and girls do not need to be given empowerment, but rather, in essence, women and girls are already empowered. Instead the capacity building needs to begin with teachers, aid workers, social workers, and people in professions who work with affected communities. The proposed framework (Figure 39), is the culmination of the research findings by establishing a methodology for re-training those who are in the business of working with women. This chapter establishes the imperative to first and foremost begin with ourselves before working with others. The pedagogy of reflection; supported by the methodology chapter, examines the significance of reflection to establish presence and care. From this stemmed the autoethnography that was central to my positionality and reflection as a research an research participant. The research findings acknowledge the multidimensional nature of empowerment and has teased elements of, resistance, endurance and perseverance in the key stakeholder narratives. The discussion and recommendations draw on a three-fold conclusion:

1. Girls and women (like all human beings) are empowered from within, although at times due to various external factors, they do not engage with their empowerment.
2. Mainstream education does not empower girls and women (and everyone else) due to the inability of looking within.
3. Mainstream education is disempowering to girls and women in the application of an external looking process.

The discussion and recommendations chapter has also exposed an exciting opportunity for the many educated and privileged individuals who want to find fulfilment and purpose in the pursuit of empowering others. It is a call on them to reposition their external facing lens and re-evaluate women and girls from marginalised and rural communities by applying the feminine principle, which draws us close to the strength and bravery that has for so long been mistaken as vulnerability and deficiency (Easterly, 2009). This discussion and recommendations chapter is not another call for saving the poor and vulnerable, but rather a call to take a step back to reconnect and co-learn in a bid to adapt knowledge for the creative purposes and imaginative flair that we all own.

10 Conclusion

The purpose of this PhD thesis is to establish a methodological framework that promotes empowerment, health, and wellbeing for girls and women through education and to better understand women's and girls' empowerment from an uneven development context. The uncontested assumptions around external empowerment and its interlinkage to schools and jobs restricted the multidimensionality of empowerment from an internal perspective. The research findings are ethnographies that take the reader through the empowerment journeys of the key stakeholders. In many ways, understanding empowerment from women from marginalised and rural experiences is a form of political activism against the European and North American metric that asserts women's formal participation in the marketplace. This thesis provides a critical focus on issues of coloniality and modernity of knowledge monopoly regarding empowerment, wellbeing, and education through its enquiry into uneven development. This thesis concludes that the development discourse is a neo-colonial project, despite its complex global reach and ethos for human flourishing (Walter, 2007; Shiva, 1999). Colonisation through external intervention is precisely the reason for the underdevelopment of the Global South and for the disruptions to communities, their sciences, rituals, and traditional knowledge: this is a root of the disablement of women and girls from marginalised and rural backgrounds (Navdanya International, 2021; Shiva, 1999; Rodney, 1972). Although coloniality is an important element to the critical examination into education, empowerment and wellbeing, the analytical framework proposed, bridges the divide between Western and non-Western, developed and undeveloped, the educated and the uneducated, through ancient philosophies and approaches like Buddhism, Hindu, Taoism, Ancient Mayan and Ancient African philosophies, which look beyond the external.

The aim of this PhD is to critically examine the modern philosophies and ancient wisdoms to formulate a framework that can facilitate empowerment of women and girls. The following three objectives are established to achieve this aim:

1. To examine the mainstream philosophies, policies, and practices on education and empowerment.
2. To analyse non-mainstream knowledge systems and ancient wisdoms on pedagogical approaches that facilitate empowerment.
3. To formulate a framework to facilitate the empowerment of girls and women in contrast to intervention-based educational approaches.

In successfully meeting the aim and objectives, this thesis has contributed to new knowledge and insights, mainly, that the development discourse is a colonial project (Shiva, 1999). This feeds into the external focus of global policies, education and empowerment that are designed to sustain a neoliberal capitalist economy rather than the internal development of the individual. This thesis offers an explicitly new insight and contributes to a new knowledge in the form of a proposed framework. The proposed framework draws from the research and the pedagogical approaches that have facilitated empowerment to shift the externalisation of empowerment and call on the facilitator to adapt to the learner through engagement, humility, all within an open cycle that gives the learner independence from the facilitator. Empowerment is discussed as an internal process that allows the person to manage the external world.

The main research question is: do educational experiences empower women in non-Western societies? The research shows that education is the best tool for the facilitation of empowerment. The research findings have crystallized the essential characteristics of empowering pedagogy. Education that booms a person's creative process is critical for what is a key term in this thesis, the *re-imagining of alternative futures* as core to empowerment and wellbeing. In this critical examination of education, the fundamental structures that govern formal mainstream education are not suited to the empowerment of women and girls from non-Western societies. The hierarchal structure of schooling has constricted

education, moving learning away from the students' environmental relevance, usefulness, and exposure to experience that builds confidence, awareness, and creativity (Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013). The key stakeholders experienced discrimination and racism due to the hierarchal structures that makes up the main part of formal mainstream education. The findings showed an intrinsic lack of agency that envelopes the learner in the mainstream education system because of the rigidity of the curriculum which positions a student as a cog in a greater system. Therefore, the facilitation of empowerment displayed by the key stakeholders was not a result of the institution that is school, but rather through the key stakeholders' awareness and engagement in the various educational experiences throughout their lives which led them to embark on a journey of empowerment. This leads us back to an important original contribution of knowledge and insight that is the inner empowerment process that propels the person to manage and bloom in the external world. The essence to this insight is typified in the proposed framework that uses a Lotus flower as a symbolic metaphor of inner empowerment and the external relations that are interconnected.

This thesis discusses empowerment as a process that can be understood through a range of qualities principled in non-violence, care, humility, and oneness. Furthermore, the discussion around internal empowerment draws on an expected opposition from the development discourse that has positioned empowerment as an external phenomenon rooted in a patriarchal market needs economy (Shiva, 1999). Neoliberal capitalism has married exponential economic growth with the self, divorcing the internal and the external as two distinct processes (M, 2017, 2012). Rather, this thesis has repositioned empowerment as an internal process to then be able to manage the external circumstances, which is a contribution to original knowledge. One of the concluding points to the thesis is the empowerment thread that runs through this thesis both from a theoretical and operational standpoint. In the critical examination of education and the emerging recommendations of this thesis, education is the perfect tool for the facilitation of internal empowerment. Education can provide the necessary space for reflection,

awareness, and creation (Shah, 2011; Freire, 1972). This thesis does not reject the external element of empowerment or the social linkages that result from inner empowerment but sets out the qualities that have emerged from the research findings and which are positioned within the feminine principle (Chinnaiyan, 2017; Shiva, 1999). The qualities that have emerged from the research as necessary on a journey to empowerment are based on humility, interconnectedness, love, compassion, and all-inclusivity. The relevance to this concluding remark is it distinguishes empowerment from other expressions of power, dominance, and retaliation founded on the individualistic and external world view. The research findings have established empowerment as an inner process that facilitates women and girls to overcome the external, like the lotus flower that is a symbolic part of the proposed framework in the recommendations section. The externalisation of empowerment is an extension of the patriarchal neoliberal capitalist market economy that is largely discriminatory, as it streamlines and dictates what women ought to become to be recognised as empowered (Smith, 1984). The full weight of coloniality in the development discourse and the global economic model has disproportionately fallen on the shoulders of women and girls from an uneven development context, strenuously disabling women folk from Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. From the research findings, the applicability and relevance of empowerment as an internal process establish an alternative paradigm beyond the development discourse that looks at care as an alternative development paradigm (Zent and Zent, 2022). Drawing from the findings of the narrative literature review, this is in line with ancient philosophies and approaches and indigenous knowledge systems like that of the Quechua communities that consider '*munay*,' (love energy, centre of the body) as an alternative development paradigm that brings a decoloniality to this research (Golden, 2020). In this non-separatist paradigm, people and nature are interconnected in an equilibrium of life with their external environment (Zent and Zent, 2022).

The damage we cause to the environment is a consequence of how we are within ourselves. If we realise that maintaining our inner

climate is in our hands, we will understand that taking action for the environment is also in our hands (Sadhguru, 2021).

This concluding theme ties in with the critical examination of education and whether it facilitates empowerment. In addition to this critique, the alternative paradigm of care is a fundamental call to further explore the feminine principle and its force for transformative change opening new opportunities to look at our relationship with nature and the climate crisis through an alternative lens. Furthermore, the internal approach to the thesis lines up well with understanding tools like technology, jobs, and schools to be re-rooted from a convivial approach (Brown and Samuel, 2013; Illich, 1978, 1973, 1970; Illich et al., 1977). This thesis also critiques the passivity in citizenship as an indicator of a mind colonised through apparatuses like formal education, consumerism, and a needs service economy (Illich, 1978, 1970; Illich et al., 1977), placating the self-governance, and freedom that remains amongst many rural, marginalised, and indigenous people. This conclusion chapter challenges the emancipation of market driven economies, establishing firmly that women are already empowered. The social, political, geographical, cultural, economic, and environmental disruptions to women's lives from non-Western societies are not inherent to their lack of empowerment or formal participation in education or political platforms, but rather to the disabling hierarchal structures and political landscapes that have applied exponential economic growth as a metric for what developed ought to mean. This conclusion chapter argues that similarly with the imposition of the Abrahamic religions that set out to convert 'others' the institutions belonging to science, education, and development are not inherent to humans or nature but have been used to recolonise in the name of development (Hamiltons, 2003; Meadows et al., 1972). In keeping in line with the concept of self-governance institutions that are dogmatic have been rejected and it is on this basis that the narrative literature review excluded Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. It is further noted that the thesis draws on theological arguments throughout the thesis acknowledging the influence, wisdom, and positive affiliation some of the key stakeholders expressed, but

nonetheless the analysis raises issues regarding the dogmatic interpretation and application of these religions through colonisation (Solnit, 2009).

Education is used as a framing concept in this thesis, which allowed the engagement of diverse ethnographies to explore the meaning of empowerment from a woman's perspective who had experiences of poverty, marginality, and discrimination. The breadth of educational experiences by all the key stakeholders enriched and broadened the narrow application of education to mean *learning* in all its forms without excluding the vitalness of non-formal and informal education. Following the vein of inclusivity, the political, cultural, societal, geographical, and economic distinctions between women and girls deepened by formal mainstream education did not impede the realisation of empowerment. Consequently, this PhD thesis has captured the human commonalities that connect us despite complex differences that are embedded in our personal environments.

The methodological and conceptual approaches to this thesis are qualitative engagements aligned to care, presence, and inclusion as key concepts (Wright and Jayawickrama, 2020; Lindekens and Jayawickrama, 2019; Jayawickrama, 2018; Jayawickrama, 2013; Kleinman, 2020, 2017, 2006, 1995). In many ways the practical component of the thesis is applied in the research design and the pedagogy from my supervisors, Dr Janaka Jayawickrama and Dr Jo Rose, like the carving of introspection. As a concluding remark, this thesis moves away from quantifying a level of empowerment. For example, the empowerment of an illiterate woman from the Bishnoi community who clung fiercely to the *Khejri* (Ghaf) tree sacrificing her life in a non-violent protest to save her forest is no less than that of another woman and vice versa. The premise of empowerment argued in this PhD thesis does not impart a hierarchal structure but argues for an engagement that examines each journey uniquely. This supports the truly qualitative approach to the research design.

The thesis has accomplished an alternative examination of empowerment setting the responsibility on the facilitator to examine their suitability; this supports

the notion of equal partnership, collaborative learning, presence, engagement, and care (Freire, 1972).

Early in the thesis development process, the leaning was towards defining empowerment. As the research progressed through the three-method process, particularly the key stakeholder engagements, empowerment was better understood as a quality. The complexity of experiences, learning, and environments highlighted the qualities of empowerment displayed as perseverance, endurance, choice, awareness, resistance, determination, and risk. This conclusion chapter rejects a universal definition of empowerment, instead proposing an alternative approach to understanding empowerment beyond a definition and through an engagement process. In this, engagement lies within awareness and presence from both the facilitator and learner (Kleinman, 2020, 2017a), equilibrating the external relationships that have divided people based on colour, culture or creed, economic and educational standing and uniting both from a shared humanity (Zent and Zent, 2022; Ngomane, 2019; Zulu, 2018; Khomba, 2011).

A broad definition of empowerment is the enhancement of self-governance, impacting society and community (Page and Czuba, 1999); this conclusion chapter argues that empowerment from the lived experience of women is not a static state but a journey. Engaging with the empowerment of others requires a sensitive ear, presence, and a self-reflective process that connects us with our shared humanity (Kleinman, 2020, 2017a). The story of 'Elephant in the Dark' by Rumi, provides an important analogy to the inapplicability of a universal definition for empowerment, particularly as the research findings show that the journey to empowerment is unique, complex, and interlinked with peoples' pre-existing traits, taking on different turns and contours all intimate to that person's journey. In the story about the Elephant in the Dark, the author argues that if you have never seen an elephant before and you enter a dark room with others, what you feel are segments that you link back to what you know: for some, an elephant may feel like a 'rounded sword made of porcelain;' others may define it as a 'leathery throne' (Rumi, 2013). This

narrative is an effective illustration and supports the thesis' justification for taking on the alternative approach of engagement.

The aim of the thesis and the relevance of education, empowerment, and its interlinkage to wellbeing draws on the work of scholars from the Global South, who through their own political struggles and experiences under oppressive structures have developed the theory of empowerment. Thus, the theory of empowerment can be traced back to the work of Freire (1972) as a pathway to liberation through education. This PhD thesis is rooted in Freire's theory of empowerment and goes beyond, to the design of a framework for the facilitation of empowerment through learning. The thesis coaxes facilitators, institutions, researchers, professionals, policymakers, and the individual to approach women's and girls' journeys to empowerment from a position of not knowing, of seeking, and genuine interest in learning, and being a part of that facilitation process. The impressions and self-determining notions that I held of empowerment, education, and wellbeing were exclusionary and separated my journey from those of my mother and grandmother. There are penetrable ideals that are based on arrogance fortified by a level of education that divides us in a subtle, yet discriminatory manner, disguised by pity and saviourism (Brown and Samuel, 2013; Illich, 1978, 1973, 1970; Illich et al., 1977). These are the darker aspects of modernity that are clasped tightly with coloniality (Walter, 2007). In this exploration of empowerment and learning, the question that emerges as a concluding reflection is, 'Has this educational experience empowered me?' In short, yes, this educational experience has been empowering. The pedagogical approach and the engagement of literature that provoked both unsettling and deep reflection created a space rarely given in formal education settings to explore the self. A PhD is not necessarily an empowering academic endeavour, as its approach, quest and purpose can be only technical, satisfying a different form of academic rigour, leaving a lighter imprint on one's reflective process. As I recall the early months when I joined this PhD, and in those long supervision meetings, I was impressed by the openness of our dialogues. My supervisors challenged me to question set truths. As more of my assertions were

discarded, I found myself walking away, with more questions. The only way I can describe what I felt was a 'not knowing' – which is different to ignorance. This early experience draws on many scholars and philosophies that take on a similar pedagogical approach, leading the learner to a semi-independent space for exploration (Kariyawasam, 2014; Popova, 2014; Watts, 1987). These spaces were not voids of nothing but of *No Thing*, an emergence of creativity that was sensitively guided through a range of literature, discussion, and questions that connects with my own experiences. The key reflection on this early pedagogical approach is two-fold:

- 1) Care and mentorship can be exercised within this space and are not necessarily operationalised with proximity.
- 2) The academic rigour is not compromised because of a shift in utilising external knowledge for self-exploration and then as an external activity.

This PhD process has changed many aspects of my life and relationships. The way that I engage with my grandmother has fundamentally changed. Engaging with her empowerment process even through the years of domestic violence that she endured made me understand that she exercised a resistance, determination, and agency: all that could be observed from an outsider's perspective was a vulnerability. My mother did not expect or wait for doors to be opened for her. Instead, she exercised an agency that is largely denied to women in vulnerable settings (Butler, 2020). This is an important concluding remark which draws on topics from the background chapter (Chapter 2), the empowerment of rural, illiterate women in India showcased in the Chipko movement and inner empowerment as an instigator to change the external. Similarly, these women did not wait on government officials, institutions, or policy to act in a manner rooted in the principles of oneness, humility, and care. By comparison, the management of the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe and America delineates the issue with mainly external empowerment and its issues regarding health and wellbeing. In the absence of inner empowerment, there arise challenges in dealing with external pressures, such as suffering and pain. It is precisely at this juncture that this thesis

argues for a revolution to empowerment and a new approach to the engagement with women and affected communities. From a personal perspective I have observed changes to the way I manage my external circumstances as a result of my own internal processes that have been prompted by this thesis. In this, my rootedness as a woman from the Global South and my experience as a refugee and collective upbringing are all reflected in my engagement with the key stakeholders expressed through my particular writing style.

The academic development following the introductory phase to my PhD journey was ownership of my ideas, arguments, and research. This is perhaps one of the first fundamental changes that I observed within myself. The inclusion of an autoethnography allowed me to draw from my own experiences and ground my learning based on scholars and philosophies, both contemporary and ancient, that have identified reflection as an empowering pedagogical approach. The benefit to an empowering educational approach is that aside from engaging in an academic endeavour one can bring the self – linking education to the mind and heart. As shown in the research findings, empowering pedagogy is attributed to the expansion of internal qualities, such as confidence, empathy, presence, and engagement, which are demonstrated externally but begin first and foremost from within. This thesis also draws on co-creation displayed in the recommendations section (Illich, 1970). In these creative spaces that have paved the way for the pedagogical approach of this PhD, the milestones reached have been fluid, impacting on my approach to dealing with difficulties as they present themselves. As found in the scoping review and the narrative literature review, this PhD's relevance is rooted in some of my own experiences (Blaak, Openjuru, and Zeelen, 2013), and is thus un-detached from my realities firmly rooted as usefulness, relevant education.

This thesis marks the beginning of my life's work as there remains a plethora of opportunities to continue developing the proposed framework and the qualities that have emerged in the findings for the facilitation of empowerment. During these three years, I have embarked on a new career as an academic and I am now

part of the teaching team of an online MSc in International Humanitarian Affairs. Other opportunities that have surged from this PhD is publishing. Appendix G: ***The Wisdom of Hugging: Understanding Care through Femininity*** is a peer reviewed article published by the Cultivate Journal which is based on the background chapter of this thesis (Chapter Two) that looks at the operationalisation of the feminine principle through Chipko. The findings from this thesis have produced an operational framework that I look forward to developing further and I welcome the engagement with development organisations like the UN on matters of women's and girls' empowerment. My plans are to publish from my thesis and further develop the lotus framework, which is a useful and innovative approach that establishes a shift in power relations. This thesis is influenced by Marxist theory, feminist theory and applies an anti-colonial lens using both Western and non-Western philosophies and approaches. In this dynamic intersection of philosophy and theory, the thesis bridges some of the shortcomings that are endemic to women's and girls' empowerment, education, and wellbeing. The poem by Khalil Gibran (1883 – 1931) called 'Fear,' expresses the precipice that leads us to taking on new challenges, entering unknown journeys and the call for women to let go. This poem embodies many of the stories that make part of this research and the decision-making by the key stakeholders to embark on adventures. In this journey through the un-known lies' choice; this is the empowerment process that this thesis defends as an internal development, drawing from all learnings and exposure to succumb to a realisation of potential and greater oneness.

To conclude, the wisdom, resistance, care, and self-governance by women who operate beyond the Western margins of development are beacons in the feminine principle who remain largely uncolonized. It is in this mutual co-learning approach that solutions to the climate crisis, rising conflict and disasters and issues on health and wellbeing can be forged.

Fear

It is said that before entering the sea

a river trembles with fear.

She looks back at the path she has travelled,

from the peaks of the mountains,

the long winding road crossing forests and villages.

And in front of her,

she sees an ocean so vast,

that to enter

there seems nothing more than to disappear forever.

But there is no other way.

The river cannot go back.

Nobody can go back.

To go back is impossible in existence.

The river needs to take the risk

of entering the ocean

because only then will fear disappear,

because that is where the river will know

it is not about disappearing into the ocean,

but of becoming the ocean.

Khalil Gibran – (1883 – 1931)

Appendices

Appendix A: Methodological Details of Included Studies at Stage 4 (N=33): (Full Text Screening)

	Author(s)	Year of publication	Title	Source origin/ country of origin	Research design & data collection	Sample/ type size	Aim/ purpose	Key findings in education initiatives in empowering women & girls	How outcomes are measured in empowering women & girls	Conclusion comments / recommendations made
1	Lewin and Sabates	2012	Who gets what? Is improved access to basic education pro-poor in Sub-Saharan Africa?	Six Anglophone countries in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA). The countries are: Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.	Typology of patterns of participation found in SSA and links this to a closer look at the growth of grade specific enrolment rates since 2000 in six countries.	Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) national household survey data was used to compare participation in education at two different points in time (1) 1990s and (2) 2000s.	The paper explores the changing patterns of access to basic education in six SSA countries. The purpose was to examine the large scale Education for All (EFA) programmes and whether they helped equalise access to education and reduce over-age students.	The lack of over-age students who are female in the adolescent bracket is not a reflection of there not being any, but rather of high school drop-out rates amongst girls.	EFA needs to be 'pro-poor.' The study highlighted a need for reform of mainstream education across the African continent. The impact of household wealth is a strong determinant in children accessing schooling compared with their poorer counterparts.	- EFA is not as pro-poor as it should be; its implementation is affecting those less fortunate - Monograde Curriculum exacerbates psychosocial issues in over-age students. - Monograde Curriculum does not facilitate empowerment in mixed age classrooms.
2	Omwami	2015	Inter-generational comparison of education attainment and implications for empowerment of women in rural Kenya.	Kenya	The study compares education access and the resultant empowerment outcomes for two generations of	The DHS population data were used and captured at two different points in time: (1) 1989 (2) 2008/09	The purpose of the analysis was to assess the extent to which access to education has contributed to empowerment	- Higher level of education is likely to open opportunities for income outside of the home.	Women's ability to earn outside of the household was a stronger factor for empowerment, education that facilitated economic	The expansion of access to basic education for women has not impacted on the lives of women or their poverty-stricken

					rural women in Kenya.		of women in Kenya as evidenced by their wealth status and social wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The focus on informal education for women could be attributed to the lack of female empowerment as it limits women's participation in lower tiers of the formal school system. - The study found that in the context of rural Kenya, improved access to postsecondary education would likely enhance women's access to wages on the open labour market and improve household incomes. - The findings from the analysis show that a focus on secondary and higher education access may be more empowering than the current focus on basic education for women. 	<p>opportunity perceived as relevant. Women's economic empowerment opens up social spaces not available to women who are economically dependent on their spouses.</p>	<p>circumstances. The concluding remarks discuss the need for women to access the labour market through secondary and higher education to narrow income inequality. Secondary and postsecondary education correlated with lower fertility rates in the same generation.</p>
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3	Raj et al.	2019	Students and brides: a qualitative analysis of the relationship between girls' education and early marriage in Ethiopia and India.	Ethiopia, (Oromia) India, (Jharkhand)	This study collected data from large in-depth qualitative interviews with girls aged 13-24 years, from both Ethiopia and India, who received intervention programmes. The girls had either been married before the age of 18 or had cancelled/postponed an early marriage proposal.	Total analytic sample (n=207) Breakdown: Cancelled marriages: 21 girls (Ethiopia) 24 (India) Marital decision makers: 41 (Ethiopia) 27 (India) Married minors: 23 girls (Ethiopia) 25 (India) Marital decision makers: 27 (Ethiopia) 25 (India)	The aim of this study was to gain insight into obstacles and resilience regarding the relationship between girls' education and early marriage in Oromia and Jharkhand. The study draws insight from both girls and marital decision makers exposed to early marriage prevention programmes.	The key findings showed that girls less academically inclined found less support from family and community to continue with their studies. Education was also closely associated with the more traditional gender norms for girls. Education in itself did not provide major opportunities outside of traditional settings. Formal education did protect from early child marriage with some girls manifesting resilience, voice and agency.	Education protects girls from early child marriage, and this has a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of the child. Some girls who were supported by family and marital decision makers experienced an increase in voice and agency. Girls also discussed the ability to learn new skills to help manage the family household and be better equipped for motherhood.	This study sheds light on the lack of opportunity that lies beyond marriage prospects for girls in rural villages. The pressures of school fees exacerbate a family's decision to take a girl out of school, particularly if she is not academically inclined. The formal education system fails to support and protect those who learn differently or more slowly. Education is also closely tied to traditional gender roles for women and is seen as potentially aiding girls to become better mothers and managers of the household income. That becomes the relevance to education in these particular settings. Education does not appear to be making major strides in breaking these moulds, due to the lack of external
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										opportunities for girls.
4	Walker and Loots	2017	Transformative change in higher education through participatory action research: a capabilities analysis	South Africa	A longitudinal project on gender, empowerment, and agency was developed. Using different methodological approaches such as in-depth biographical interviews and a survey. Implementing a Participatory action research (PAR) project running from March to October 2015 to explore change amongst themselves.	13 undergraduate students were involved, students of one rural South African University	PAR aims to further social justice. The aim of the study was to understand the impact of PAR projects in higher education settings beyond the classroom.	The catalyst of change that was a result of the PAR Project showed that participants formed their own formal and informal spaces to talk about gender and inequality, changing values and attitudes and developing different kinds of knowledge. There was a deeper engagement through reflection and participation.	The ontological change promoted an increase in voice and agency. The participants developed a sense of agency through this process, also increasing a greater social participation and engagement. This new knowledge is found to also help the community. The study also presented the opportunity for more PAR projects in higher education for the development of social justice.	Reflection and discussion enabled them to share their knowledge in formal and informal spaces on campus, becoming transformative agents of change. These changes in perception and values also brought about epistemological changes where the participants started questioning the knowledge they had on gender. The study concludes that the philosophy of PAR should be brought back in higher education projects.
5	Jones	2015	Post primary education and capabilities: Insights from young women in rural Uganda	Uganda	3 rd stage of a longitudinal case study from 2004 – present, involving a group of young women who attended secondary school together in rural Uganda.	Nine remaining participants from 15 girls in the initial stage of the study.	This longitudinal case study explored the ways in which post primary education has impacted on their adult lives, particularly with respect to	The economic opportunities which were available to these women through post primary education allowed for a greater state of wellbeing and agency. With economic	Education that allows for economic opportunity allows for greater social participation, confidence, voice, and agency. Empowerment is understood as helping families and communities, where the	The study draws some interesting conclusions, primarily that there remains a sense of constriction, and empowerment to its fullest is not obtained. Their pay and opportunities are limited, and they feel a sense of frustration and

							employment-related factors.	empowerment came a greater sense of independence, and ability to help family and community. Social bonds were an important aspect of the key findings.	participants felt more confident and with a desire to give back. There was a greater chance for participants to make meaningful choices and have a higher social engagement.	inability to reach full potential. The gains that these women made were also made in spite of poor-quality education. Formal mainstream education alone without policies and programmes in place specific to adolescent girls' needs cannot independently facilitate empowerment.
6	Wiggins	2012	Popular education for health promotion and community empowerment: A review of the literature	Literature review of studies in Brazil, Canada, Mexico, Nicaragua, Norway, Puerto Rico, Denegal, Taiwan, the UK, and the USA.	Systematic review of peer reviewed international literature.	A total of 29 identifiable articles were included using EBSCO host to search for Premier, E-Journals, Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition, Fuente Academica, MasterFILE Premier, MedicLatina, Medline and Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Index, and UK PubMed Central.	A systematic review of international literature that aims to explore the potential of popular education as a tool to address inequalities and improve health.	The literature review reveals support for popular education, strongly based on Freire's philosophy of education. Health education which takes into account community and self-efficacy promotes significant improvement in psychosocial empowerment. The awakening of conscientisation	Empowerment leads to improved health and wellbeing that is fostered by social interaction. This social interaction can also be attributed to strong bonds between students and student teacher relations. The increase of voice and agency is also attributed to the acquisition of new skills, this could be confidence or a better understanding of the self, which motivates	The findings revealed that empowering education is an effective method for enhancing empowerment and improves health. Further research is needed to really comprehend the full potential for popular education. Neither the effectiveness of the interventions described, nor the influence of the studies reviewed can be taken for granted. If practitioners and researchers want both interventions

								can facilitate empowerment.	meaningful decision-making.	and studies to be optimally effective, the literature reveals a number of steps they need to take.
7	Stromquist	2015	Women's empowerment and education: Linking knowledge to transformative action.	A review of article titles of industrialised and developing countries.	A systematic review of article titles.	A review of articles in three prestigious articles using 'empowerment' in their title.	To examine the realities of women in both developing and industrialised countries. To make empowerment a concrete reality.	Empowerment is based on individual self-discovery, confidence and assertiveness together with the conscientisation of one's world and collective organisations. Knowledge plays a key role in women's empowerment.	The enhancement of voice and agency through self-realisation promotes health and wellbeing and social interactions.	Formal education still has a long journey before it is able to equip its students for empowerment. The narrow focus of reading maths and science diverts from gender consciousness efforts. More support is needed at the national and international levels.
8	Wilson-Strydom and Walker	2015	A capabilities-friendly conceptualisation of flourishing in and through education	South Africa	Longitudinal study drawing on qualitative data collected at a South African university during year one of the study.	40 student participants	The aim of the study was to understand the flourishing through education and how education draws attention to promoting wellbeing in students who come from marginalised and deprived areas in South Africa.	Confidence was a key finding, particularly when it came to participating in class discussions, which linked the study to relevance in education. The passing of education through all its tiers is also needed to prepare students with a	For the students, there was a desire to go back to their communities and act as role models to help the next generation. Social participation was also an outcome, when they felt support either from peers or students. Voice and agency were also some of the greatest markers and the need to have	A capabilities approach to the conceptualisation of flourishing in higher education allows for relational wellbeing and agency. Moving beyond subjective happiness, and in the case of Andrew it was clearly highlighted some of the barriers which were felt in his journey to empowerment regardless of whether he

								certain confidence found in self-realisation. In order to flourish people, need supportive bonds and self-efficacy. Quality education and empowerment in relation to helping a community was also present.	confidence to exercise one's agency was crucial as a determinant. Confidence was associated with increased health and wellbeing too.	succeeded at university level. The article argues that higher education needs to develop graduates and their capabilities for practical reasons, affiliation, and emancipatory values.
9	Dejaeghere, Wiger, and Willemsen	2016	Broadening educational outcomes: Social relations, skills development, and employability for youth.	Tanzania	The data used was from a longitudinal study (2012-2017) with a mixed methods design and multiple sites. The research gathered in-depth interviews with stakeholders and NGO staff. This study also conducted a survey and an interview each year with youth. while attending lower secondary school	83 interviews conducted with NGO staff and key stakeholders and 55 yearly interview data from youths attending two schools for three years.	The aim of this study was to conceptualise affiliation, care, and imagining alternative futures as three analytical categories of social relations to help youths use social status and power to build their futures.	Social roles play an important part in the transformation of youth and convert to social capital. This supports securing employment and wellbeing particularly for marginalised youths. Furthermore, social roles also aid in self-reflection and imagining alternative futures.	Being a role-model to younger siblings and contributing to the community are present in this study and show empowerment understood in this way. Social capital allowed for the students to increase their voice and agency as they gained confidence. This in turn increased social participation and the acquisition of new skills. Health and well-being were positively impacted on together with the ability to make	To conclude these social relations in contexts of social, economic and environmental constraints, thus drawing attention to how these relations need to account for and attend to unequal power and social status. Thus, social relations interact with learning outcomes and future livelihoods.

									meaningful choices. This has increased employment prospects through the skills learnt and entrepreneurial skills.	
10	Valdes-Cotera, Wang, and Lunardon	2018	Releasing lifelong learning for all: Governance and partnerships in building sustainable learning cities.	Collective of previous studies - Urban cities	Article	N/A	To carry on the discussion of the first special issue of this journal on the development of inclusive, prosperous, and sustainable urban communities.	The imperative to build sustainable learning cities through governance and partnerships. Learning should be implemented as a life-long and life-wide approach to modern urban cities.	Some of the main findings are the attractive learning opportunities to implement sustainable education structures which equip citizen with knowledge, skills, and attitudes to tackle the unprecedented challenges faced by society today. Learning comes in life-long and life-wide forms.	There is a need to explore further ways to develop learning opportunities inside and outside of the school system and the actions that can be taken to infuse learning into the entire life of a city. Learning does not have to be restricted to just the classroom, but it can be implemented in every aspect of our lives.
11	Lloyd and Hewett	2009	Educational inequalities in the midst of persistent poverty: Diversity across Africa in educational outcomes.	SSA	Article that uses data from the DHS and UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS)	Cross-country variation in primary school completion.	To carry out a cross-country study exploring the inequalities in education across SSA.	The educational outcomes amongst the poorest 24 SSA countries show a surprising variation in both primary completion rate and literacy. This suggests that educational progress is	The need for reform in the current mainstream education system. Quality education is compromised at times by the surge in school attendance.	The main conclusion of the study is that primary school completion rates in most African countries remain far below levels required. This sheds light on the EFA policies and their inability to be pro-poor. The compromise of

								possible even in resource challenged environments.		quality of education is an issue with an increase in primary school enrolment. Furthermore, some very poor countries have been able to achieve relatively high primary school completion.
12	Marit Blaak and Openjuru	2013	Non-formal vocational education in Uganda: Practical empowerment through a workable alternative.	Uganda	Overt non-participatory observations and field notes in 17 in-depth quasi-structured interviews with participants.	17 in-depth quasi-structured interviews.	The aim was to gain insight into the perceptions of early school leavers about effective features of non-formal vocational education and its impact.	The flexible aspects of non-formal education manage to reach marginalised people. Relevant education allowed students to progress and expand into economic empowerment. Social capital, mentoring, and confidence were prominent themes.	Confidence and self-reliance allowed students to increase their voice and agency. Students increased their social participation and gained new skills. That in turn provided them with the ability to make more meaningful decisions that positively impacted on health and wellbeing. The notion of empowerment was also expressed by contributing to community and family.	The adaptability to non-formal education presents the opportunity for students to self-reflect. This correlates to the philosophy of the pedagogy of the oppressed. The acquisition of relevant skills contributes to self-reliance, and social capital is also discussed as benefiting students. the paper also discusses the lack of individual adaptability that allows for makers to be made between formal and non-formal education. The lack of accreditation that can be present in non-formal education was expressed as a

										barrier or a sense of inferiority, regardless of its positive outcomes.
13	Nkechinyere Amadi	2011	Access and success: The role of distance education in girl-child education in Nigeria.	Nigeria	Article	Country-specific study.	The impact of open and distance learning (ODL) in balancing inequalities between age groups and extending geographical access to education in Nigeria.	Distance education can make an impact to the access and quality of education that the girl-child receives. Certain barriers (like safety) that girls face is also discussed in the light of ODL, and its potential to overcome them.	The increase of employment as an outcome was discussed in the article. Technological advancement and inclusion in formal education was at the heart of the discussion, particularly in that quality education does not need to be compromised. This was also reflected in pedagogical recommendations.	The particular issues that the girl-child faces in the context of uneven development could be overcome by the inclusion of ODL. Employment is a strong desirable outcome of education, where ODL can offer women the possibility of organising learning and professional development in the workplace. Quality education is usually compromised in marginalised settings. Through technology, safety and quality can be achieved.
14	Shah	2011	Girls' education and discursive spaces for empowerment: Perspectives from rural India.	India (Gujarat)	Article, examining a national girls' education programme. An ethnographic and institutional approach. Impromptu interviews and discussions with key educational	15 months of ethnographic research at one KGBV school in Gujarat. Multiple informal, impromptu interviews and discussions with key educational administrators –	The study investigated how empowerment was manifested in a KGBV school and the programme's ability to create a unique	The findings were at school-level: this school model showed that through its 'space' it focused on the empowerment of its students and teachers. They discussed	Self-reflection through 'space' increased the confidence which expanded the voice and agency of girls. Social participation was increased by the breaking down of hierarchies and	This study examined the relationship between empowerment and the model school of KGBV. The specific relationship and support by CARE and the government of the KGBV school contributed to its

					administrators, teachers, parents, and female students.	the State Gender Coordinator – the District Gender Coordinator – the Cluster Resource Coordinator – three female teachers at KGB, and the 52 female students and parents of the girls.	‘space’ that fosters empowerment.	and reflected on their positions in society and families, allowing for conscientisation. The school adopted an emotional learning, through social bonds and mentorship that fosters confidence.	fostering new relations with peers and students. The girls were better aware of their lives to make meaningful choices that impacted on their health and wellbeing. This was closely associated with the risk of child marriage. The girls acquired new skills for both economic empowerment and empowerment manifested in wanting to be role models and help family and communities.	success. The school focused specifically on empowering girls from marginalised backgrounds. The social capital and self-reflective nature of the pedagogical approaches adopted by the KGBV school equipped the girls to go back to their villages and homes and have a greater agency and voice. This has impacted on their ability to make meaningful choices. The reality of their circumstances has not necessarily altered because of their education; it’s their ability to navigate such settings which has changed. Health and wellbeing are at the forefront of the study represented in self-confidence and self-resilience.
15	Dejaeghere and Lee	2011	What matters for marginalised girls and boys in Bangladesh: A capabilities approach for understanding	Bangladesh	The study draws from a longitudinal study as part of an eight-country initiative. Qualitative and	The analysis included data from 78 school-age children in grades 3 to 5, who had dropped out	To understand the specific local conditions that marginalise, and capabilities	Education that fosters wellbeing for girls and boys in these communities	Relevant education that allows for the acquisition of new skills can empower by securing the	Work opportunity is closely associated with the relevance to education, in terms of girls, given that there is a lack

			educational wellbeing and empowerment		quantitative data were gathered from mothers, fathers, girls, boys, and community members.	from these grades in the past (40 male and 38 female students).	that are valued for educational wellbeing.	needs to be linked to relevant and applicable work that improves the lives of families. This study strongly touches on the relevance of education and the social and emotional aspects of education. This allows for the visualisation of alternative futures.	student with economic empowerment. The study also exposes the importance of safe learning, and emotional learning through support, mentorship, and social bonds that increase confidence and self-reliance. This benefits the health and wellbeing, voice and agency, and meaningful choice ability.	of work opportunities in general; education may be limited as a transformative catalyst for empowering women socially and economically in these communities. The perceptions of teachers also form and impact on the attitudes girls and boys have towards themselves, and their ability to imagine alternative futures. This impacts on the gendered beliefs that are manifested in the curriculum and pedagogy.
16	Seeberg	2014	girl's schooling empowerment in rural China: identifying capabilities and social change in the village.	China (Western China – Xiangcun Sisters)	Series of observational studies from 2000 and 2012. Participant observations. Following a recursive interpretive process using the empowerment-capability approach. Semi-structured interviewing, analysis of letters, personal	Participant observation of 42 girls from one village. The study used 27 XS participants and three data sets; interviews conducted in 2010.	To explore how an elaborated HDCA framework applied to education can contribute to a better understanding of the intangibles of empowerment for severely excluded girls, those who are marginalised	Identification of the empowering effects of schooling. The participants were able through school to learn to formulate their arguments against early child marriage which directly impacted on their health and wellbeing. The social elements	Voice and agency were increased through education and the ability to make meaningful choices in their lives; this impacted on their economic empowerment and job opportunities. The social and emotive aspect of their learning allowed for confidence and	The study found that even severely excluded girls experienced empowerment through schooling, which constituted both a subjective process and instrumental goals that influenced changes in social arrangements, expanding social justice. The Chinese national education policy needs to

					communication and field-visit observations were part of a reiterative process of coding and analysing.		on multiple dimensions.	and visualisation of alternative futures propelled the girls to want to achieve more. Support was important and particularly peer support. There were identified opportunities beyond the village that were attainable through education.	self-reliance which had an impact on their health and wellbeing. This showed a great alignment to relevant education and its use in creating extra opportunities. Furthermore, students expressed empowerment through helping their families and communities.	direct itself urgently to improving the quality and availability of vocational technical senior secondary and non-formal skill training in towns and cities, and to continuously improving primary and lower secondary education in rural areas to counter the alarming increase in system-wide rural urban inequalities that disproportionately affect village girls and women.
17	Zhao	2011	Empowerment in a socialist egalitarian agenda: Minority women in China's higher education system.	China	Field work conducted over a period of a six months at three Chinese universities in 2004. The data were collected through interviews.	The data came from three types of informants, (1) 19 female Mongol students at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. (2) 25 male Mongol students, 27 Han students and either other ethnic minority students (3) 43 academic and administrative staff members.	Paper examines socialist equalisation through state education through the lens of empowerment.	The inclusivity of higher education in Chinese society has failed to provide meaningful participation of ethnic group members, despite policy incentives. This is largely due to a paternalistic approach towards empowerment. The sense of alienation affected self-	Collective empowerment is fostered through social relations, where people feel an affinity and can relate and be self-reflective.	Focusing on Chinese society, the findings show that empowerment through the state education system is performed through a top-down imposition of policy interventions. Participants encounter a culture that tells them their personal worth is associated to their value as a commodity for exchanging in the mainstream market.

								confidence and participation.		Empowerment is not understood as a profound multidimensional process.
18	Acharya and Robinson–Pant	2019	Women, literacy and health: Comparing health and education sectoral approaches in Nepal.	Nepal	Literature review on policy discourse in health knowledge	N/A	This article sets out to provide a broader perspective on literacy, health and gender equality in Nepal, with the aim of informing on future policy and programme directions.	The main findings highlight the missing links between informal education, indigenous knowledge and health. Non-formal education is at a disadvantage when it is presumed that the starting point is from a deficit of knowledge. The inclusion of mother tongue is important and a space for self-reflection. The emotional bonds and community inclusion play an indispensable role into bettering the health knowledge.	Emotional and supportive bonds allow for the fostering of confidence and social participation. The voice and agency of women, when enhanced, allow for meaningful engagement in health and wellbeing decisions. Furthermore, the acquisition of new skills can better inform meaningful decisions.	Health education is still largely focused on teaching women about modern (Western) knowledge and skills related to safe motherhood. Informal education and indigenous knowledge are largely ignored and their potential to empower and enhance the health and wellbeing of women in marginalised communities is unknown. The formalisation of non-formal programmes creates rigidity and can fail to ensure full community participation in matters of health, and rather focus on literacy as opposed to instructing transformative health knowledge. The social aspect and participatory elements of non-

										formal education foster confidence and self-reliance.
19	Shah	2016	Partnerships and appropriation: Translating discourses of access and empowerment in girls' education in India.	India	Article, socio-cultural approach to policy analysis.	N/A	To illustrate how various actors involved in a state-NGO partnership provide marginalised girls with educational opportunities related to schooling and empowerment in India.	The government needs to support more educational leaders with gender-sensitive pedagogy and transformative vision. The formalisation of the KGBV school has meant that some of the teachers have felt over worked and without enough time to delve into empowerment teaching.	The government needs to ensure further support and teacher training for models such as the KGBV school.	At a national level, the KGBV programme is committed to ensuring that the school also complies with national exams. The formal aspect of the school hinders some of the more empowering elements of the KGBV model and can side track the self-reflective aspect and emotional learning that is deemed as indispensable to the school.
20	UN Women	2012	ICT training opens windows of opportunity for rural women.	Ecuador	News Article	N/A	To report on the impact ICT training is having on rural women from El Oro in Ecuador.	ICT training for rural women in the community has allowed them to contend with the government and petition for change in their communities, impacting on their health and that of their community.	Through ICT training, women have greater voice and agency as they petition for better housing and drinking water. They feel united. They have acquired new skills, which have impacted on their health as they make meaningful choices. The technological impact has also meant that they	The ICT training allowed for the women to develop a greater confidence and to feel empowered. This was expressed by their ability to petition and create change. Self-reliance and social connectedness with women in the ICT programme allowed for them to feel useful. This has been shown in the

									have employment opportunities.	creation of networks.
21	UN Women	2018	Meet the African girls who are coding to make a difference.	Ethiopia	News Article	80 girls from 34 African countries attending the first coding camp in Ethiopia.	The launch of the African Girls can CODE initiative is a four-year programme to equip girls with digital literacy.	The camp allowed girls to develop an interest in technology and bond with other girls creating networks and helping them to develop confidence. The girls also developed entrepreneurial ideas about how to tackle issues and help communities with technology.	Girls developed social skills and grew in confidence as they acquired new technological skills and interests.	The exposure to technology sparked interest in the girls, broke through certain stereotypical barriers related to the capabilities of girls with technology. The camp also cultivated friendships and bonds, as girls from 34 countries were able to get together and bond over technology.
22	UN Women and WAGGGS	2013	Launch of pioneering non-formal curriculum to end violence against women and girls.	N/A	News Article	N/A	The co-educational curriculum is designed for various age groups to allow boys, girls, women, and men to understand the root causes of violence in their communities.	Gender-based violence starts at an early age; through this programme, it is expected that prevention starts early.	The ability for communities to interact and discuss the root issues through a participatory, co-educational curriculum increases social participation, voice, and agency. It equips communities with tools, impacting on choice and health decisions through the prevention of early marriage.	Early prevention is a key factor in changing perceptions and norms which harm the girl and woman. The inclusion of boys, and young men is a coming together of community and working with everyone in a unified manner to understand the root issues to violence against women and cultivate reflection.

23	Jones, Presler-Marshall, and Kahane	2019	Gender and age-responsive social protection: The potential of cash transfers to advance adolescent rights and capabilities.	Africa; Latin America and the Caribbean; Kenya; Malawi; Mexico; South Africa; Tanzania, United Republic of Zambia; Zimbabwe.	Briefs; Policy papers. UN Women policy brief Series.	N/A	Cash transfers can make an impact on the lives of adolescents, but the report shows that there are mixed reviews. Conditional cash transfers are more impactful, particularly when they are attached to specific instruction.	Some of the key challenges in implementing successful cash programmes lies in the disconnect between knowledge about the desired outcome and behaviour. The cash transfer has a higher chance to be successfully implemented when specific instruction is attached, challenging norms and health knowledge.	The acquisition of new skills and knowledge to impact on behavioural change and health outcomes.	Relevancy is key regarding cash transfers and incentives. Traditional cash transfers alone fail to overcome some of the more deeply grounded norms that restrict education for girls. There is potential for conditional cash transfers to promote health and wellbeing knowledge amongst communities.
24	Global Education Monitoring Report Team	2014	Education for all monitoring report 2013/14: Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all	France	Monitoring report	N/A	Flagship Reports identifying important learning approaches that advance quality education for all.	The inclusion of students from minority backgrounds contributes significantly to securing quality education for all. This can be achieved by the inclusion of ethnic and linguistic minorities, who support foundation skills. Extended	Greater social participation is achieved when community programmes are a part of the educational landscape, supporting students with the acquisition of new skills. Recommendations made on bilingual teaching and a greater inclusion	Inclusion is a big part of achieving quality education, education that is child-centred and permits children to learn in a way that is relevant to them. Teachers also need to be developed and come together with the community to support and extend classes and activities that can support students. This helps to boost school

								schools can accommodate extra learning using coordinated community volunteers to help with after school reading.	into students' backgrounds.	enrolment and indicates that policies for girls in fragile environments can be effective at younger ages.
25	Bandiera et al.	2018	Women's Empowerment in action: Evidence from a randomised control trial in Africa	Africa	Report	5000 adolescent girls at baseline, midline (two years post-intervention) and endline (four years post-intervention).	A report with BRAC to evaluate the programme in an African setting where women face similar challenges to those in Bangladesh. 'Adolescent development clubs,' promote hard vocational skills.	The purpose of the clubs is to support adolescent girls with vocational skills and support the economic empowerment of girls by giving them human capital. The results suggest that a multifaceted skills intervention can impact positively on girls' empowerment.	The acquisition of new skills from soft to hard vocational skills gives social capital, increasing social participation. Adolescent girls can experience economic empowerment that provides a greater sense of independence, self-resilience, and protects the health and wellbeing of girls.	Non-formal educational programmes, which are implemented with the community in mind and to support the needs of its students can show very successful results. The clubs which equip girls with vocational and life skills foster confidence and self-resilience. Furthermore, girls are able to experience economic empowerment and make better decisions regarding their health and wellbeing. They then avoid unwanted sexual relationships for the purposes of survival.
26	International Labour Office	2011	Increasing the employability of disadvantaged youth.	N/A	Skills for employment policy brief.	N/A	This brief looks at ways to improve the	Programmes which focus on economic	The acquisition of relevant skills can equip those who	Relevant education is seen as an indispensable

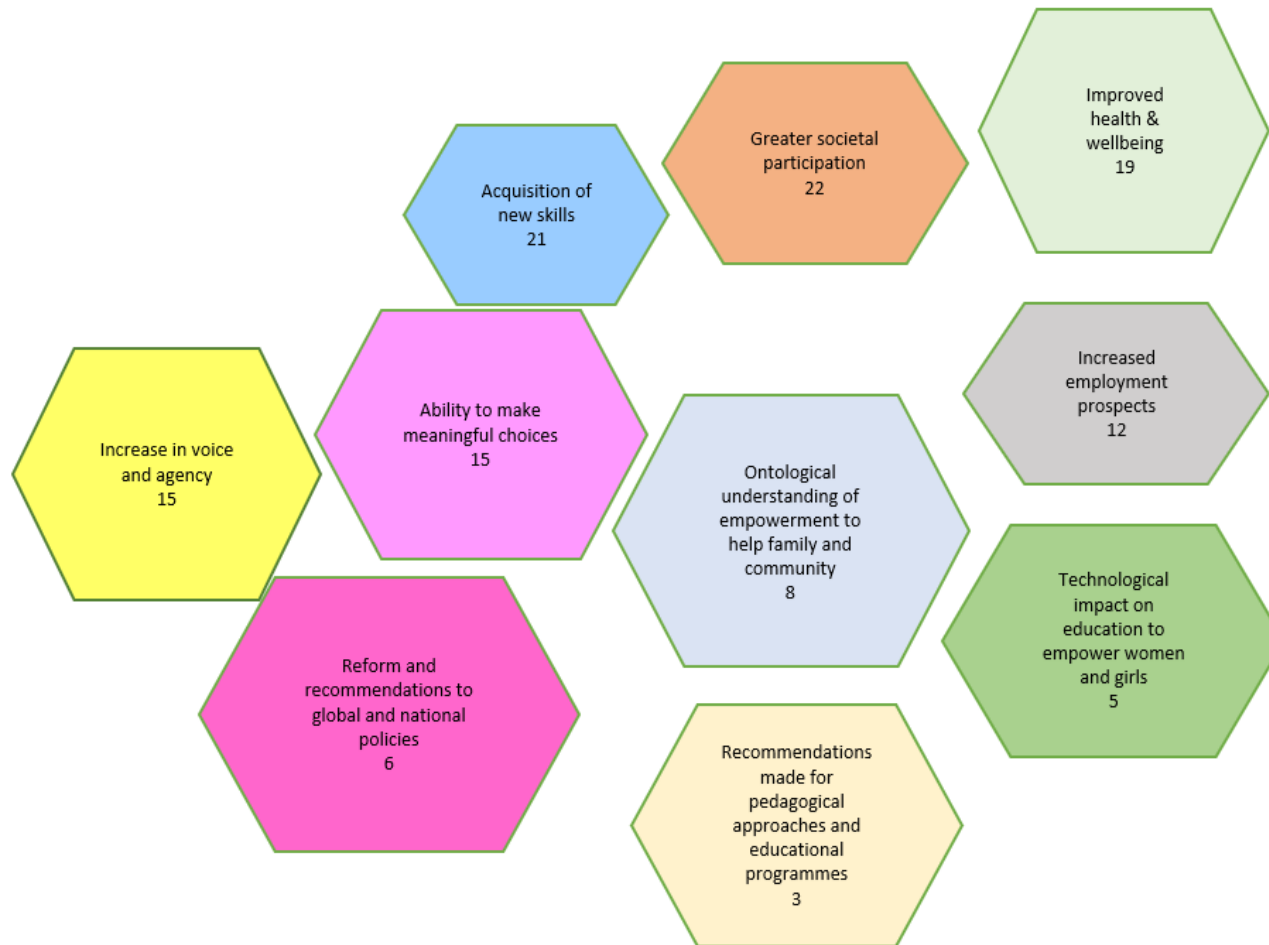
							chances of young women and men, who are already disadvantaged by their circumstances, to enter or re-enter the labour market.	empowerment can support the most vulnerable to acquire new skills and enter the job market. Some of these programmes entice trainees to receive small stipends contingent upon classroom attendance. Skills training is shown to be an effective policy for optimising employability among young women.	are most vulnerable to experience economic empowerment. The programmes also contribute to greater social participation and employability. Economic empowerment increases self-resilience, supporting health and decision-making.	component when it comes to allowing youths to experience economic empowerment. Cash transfer initiatives have been seen across countries to target poor youths and have had a positive result in Latin America. This can mitigate the short-term impact of an income crisis and its long-term negative effects.
27	The World Bank	2012	Can skills training programmes increase employment for young women? The case of Liberia.	Liberia	This brief feature work supported by the World Bank's Gender and Development Department and the Africa	N/A	The evaluation of EPAG is designed around girls' needs. Participation is incentivised creatively through attendance prizes.	The EPAG evaluation provides strong evidence that skills training can be an effective policy option for increasing employment among young women in Liberia.	New skills that include hard vocational and life skills in an environment where networks can be formed. Economic empowerment through entrepreneurial skills increases employment prospects. The health and wellbeing of women are positively impacted together with their choices.	Entrepreneurial skills are key in ensuring that those who are on the margins of unemployment are able to secure it through programmes like EPAG. Vocational skills and life skills have a strong impact on the lives of young women. The EPAG evaluation increases employment by 50%, validating the importance of delivering business

											skills training along with job and life-skills training in contexts where wage employment is limited.
28	Sandys	2007	Women, gender equality, and sport	N/A	Report to promote the goals of the Beijing Declaration and the platform for action.	N/A	Promoting the importance of sports in girls and women of all ages, to contribute to empowerment and health.	The report calls for governments to create and support programmes in the education system, workplace, and community to make opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity.	Sports can be an important tool for social empowerment, teaching social participation through teamwork, negotiation, leadership, communication, and respect for others, improving health and wellbeing.	Sport can serve as a vehicle to improve women's and girls' leadership roles and participation in decision-making.	
29	UN Women	N/A	Virtual Skills School (VSS)	N/A	Evaluation reports on UN women's virtual skills school	N/A	The brief evaluated the VSS as it strives to provide an innovative approach to delivering high quality learning programmes that will leverage opportunities for girls and women.	The VSS meets individual girls' and women's learning needs and desires for personal development, in preparation for 21 st century skills development opportunities to prepare for an ICT based knowledge society.	Technological skills knowledge that supports income-generating strategies and increases social participation. Non-formal education provides second chance education and training in vocational skills to enhance economic empowerment.	The VSS will be an open platform for girls, women, boys, and men around the globe. Gender equality and women's rights will be at the heart of all learning paths through key journeys, incorporating vocational training, and second chance education.	
30	World Bank	2020	Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) top policy lessons on empowering	SSA	Brief On GIL.	N/A	The brief discusses the success of the	Community based girls' clubs promote life-	Learning new skills and being able to make meaningful	The programme had positive impacts on income and on girls'	

			adolescent girls: Gender innovation lab.				GIL, and its potential for girls' empowerment programmes to change the life of young women.	skills training, and vocational training to empower girls.	choices regarding their health and wellbeing was reinforced by social participation and support through mentors and peers.	decision-making power about childbearing, marriage, and sexual activity. The social element of this programme and its mentors played a crucial role in developing confidence and self-esteem.
31	Babacar Fall	2007	ICT in education in the Democratic Republic of Congo.	Democratic Republic of Congo	N/A	Survey of ICT and education in Africa: Democratic Republic of Congo Country Report.	This short country report is a result of a larger infoDev-supported Survey of ICT use in education in the country. ICT use in education is at a particularly exciting stage in Africa.	The community resource and learning centre bridges between community and schools. The centre provides the necessary infrastructure to train health and education workers, community members, and primary school children in the use of ICT.	The acquisition of new technological skills that positively impact on health and wellbeing, expanding employment outcomes.	ICT in education allows for communities to grow in resilience and address chronic information shortages.
32	World Bank	2020	Africa GIL	Africa	Report On GIL	N/A	The report discusses the success of GIL and its potential for girls' empowerment programmes to change the lives of young women.	Community based girls' clubs promote life-skills training and vocational training to empower girls.	Learning new skills and being able to make meaningful choices regarding their health and wellbeing was reinforced by social participation and support through mentors and peers.	The programme had positive impacts on income and on girls' decision-making power about childbearing, marriage, and sexual activity. The social element of this programme and its mentors played a crucial role in developing

										confidence and self-esteem.
33	Kabeer	2002	Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment	UK	Article Review	N/A	The paper argues that there are three dimensions of choice. The notion of choice is further qualified by referring to the conditions of choices, their content and consequences. Attempting to incorporate the structural parameters of individual choice in the analysis of women's empowerment.	The ability to choose is central to the concept of power. Choices are made from the vantage point of alternatives and those reflecting the absence, or the punishingly high cost.	The ability to make meaningful choices.	Given the valuable nature of the concept of women's empowerment, there is a danger that analysts opt for those meanings which most favour their own values regarding what constitutes appropriate choices for women. The authors also noted the importance of ensuring that the values which inform definitions and measures of empowerment are sensitive to the domain of possibilities in which women are located.

Appendix B: Map of Outcomes



Appendix C: Publication Characteristics

First Author	Year	Institution affiliation of first author	Country of affiliation of the first author	Last name of corresponding author	Country of affiliation of the corresponding author	Collaboration between academics or non-academic (NGOs)	Name of journal	Type of publication	Study design	Year study was conducted	Statement on conflict of interest	Ethical approval
Lewin	2012	Department of Education, University of Sussex, UK	UK	Sabates	Same as first author	No mention	International Journey of Education Development	Review article	Comparative analysis	No mention	No mention	No mention
Omwami	2015	Department of Education UCLA	California, US	Same as first author	Same as first author	No mention	Gender, Place and Culture	Review article	Comparative analysis	No mention	No mention	No mention
Raj	2019	Department of Education Studies, Division of Social Sciences, University of California San Diego	California, San Diego	McDougal	Same as first author	No mention	BMC Public Health	Research article	Qualitative study	2014	The authors declare there is no conflict of interest	By the Public Health Institute Institutional Review Board
Walker	2017	Centre for Research on Higher Education and Development, University of the Free State	Bloemfontein, South Africa	Loots	Same as first author	No mention	Educational Action Research	Perspectives	Capabilities analysis	No mention	No mention	No mention
Jones	2015	Aga Khan University-Institute for Educational Development	Dar es Salaam, Tanzania	Same as first author	Same as first author	No mention	African Education Review	Research article	Longitudinal mixed methods study	2004 - 2015	No mention	No mention
Wiggins	2012	Multnomah County Health Department, Community	US, Portland	Same as first author	Same as first author	No mention	Health Promotion International	Systematic review	Focused literature review	No mention	No mention	No mention

First Author	Year	Institution affiliation of first author	Country of affiliation of the first author	Last name of corresponding author	Country of affiliation of the corresponding author	Collaboration between academics or non-academic (NGOs)	Name of journal	Type of publication	Study design	Year study was conducted	Statement on conflict of interest	Ethical approval
		Capacitation Centre										
Stromquist	2015	College of Education, University of Maryland	US	Same as first author	Same as first author	No mention	European Journal of Education	Review article	A review of titles in three prestigious comparative education journals	No mention	No mention	No mention
Wilson-Strydom	2015	University of the Free State	Bloemfontein, South Africa	Walker	Same as first author	No mention	Journal of Moral Education	Research article	Longitudinal qualitative study	(2014 – 2016)	No mention	No mention
Dejaeghere	2016	University of Chicago	US	Willemsen	Same as first author	No mention	Comparative Education Review	Research article	Longitudinal qualitative study	(2012-2017)	No mention	No mention
Valdes-Cotera	2018	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning	Germany	Luardon	Same as first author	UNESCO institute for Lifelong Learning	International Review of Education	Article	Analysis	No mention	No mention	No mention
Lloyd	2009	Population Council	New York, US	Hewett	Same as first author	No mention	Journal of International Development	Article review	Retrospective analysis	No mention	No mention	No mention
Blaak	2013	Department of Lifelong Learning University of Groningen	The Netherlands	Zeelen	Same as first author	No mention	International Journal of Educational Development	Research article	Qualitative overt, non-participatory observation study	2019	No mention	No mention
Nkechinyere Amadi	2011	Department of Educational Administration, Faculty of Education, University of Lagos	Lagos, Nigeria	Same as the first author	Same as first author	No mention	US-China Education Review	Short article	Analysis	No mention	No mention	No mention
Shah	2011	Department of Education Policy Studies Indiana University School of Education	Bloomington, US	Same as first author	Same as first author	No mention	Research in Comparative International Education	Research article	Qualitative ethnographic study	No mention	No mention	No mention

First Author	Year	Institution affiliation of first author	Country of affiliation of the first author	Last name of corresponding author	Country of affiliation of the corresponding author	Collaboration between academics or non-academic (NGOs)	Name of journal	Type of publication	Study design	Year study was conducted	Statement on conflict of interest	Ethical approval
Dejaeghere	2011	Department of Organisational Leaderships, Policy and Development, University of Minnesota	Minneapolis, US	Lee	Same as the first author	CARE USA/Bangladesh	Research in Comparative and International Education	Research article	Longitudinal mixed methods study	No mention	No mention	No mention
Seeberg	2014	University of Chicago	US	Same as first author	Same as first author	No mention	Comparative Education Review	Research article	Longitudinal participant observation qualitative study	No mention	No mention	No mention
Zhao	2011	Centre for Governance and Citizenship, Hong Kong, Institute of Education	Hong Kong, China	Same as first author	Same as first author	No mention	Gender and Education	Research Article	Qualitative research study	No mention	No mention	No mention
Acharya	2017	Department of Foundation of Education and Department of Education Planning and Management of the Central Department of Education, Tribhuvan University	Kathmandu, Nepal	Same as first author	Robinson-Pant	No mention	Compare	Review Article	Analysis	No mention	The authors declare there is no conflict of interest	No mention
Shah	2016	Foundations of Education and Qualitative Inquiry, Department of Education Studies,	US	Same as first author	Same as first author	No mention	International Journal of Educational Development	Review article	Analysis	No mention	No mention	No mention

First Author	Year	Institution affiliation of first author	Country of affiliation of the first author	Last name of corresponding author	Country of affiliation of the corresponding author	Collaboration between academics or non-academic (NGOs)	Name of journal	Type of publication	Study design	Year study was conducted	Statement on conflict of interest	Ethical approval
		College of Education, University of South Carolina										
UN Women	2012	No mention	No mention	Same as first author	Same as first author	UN Women	No mention	News article	Commentary	No mention	No mention	No mention
UN Women	2018	No mention	No mention	Same as first author	Same as first author	Un Women	No mention	News article	Commentary	No mention	No mention	No mention
UN Women	2013	No mention	New York	Same as first author	Same as first author	Un Women World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS)	No mention	News article	Commentary	No mention	No mention	No mention
Jones	2019	No mention	New York	Kahane	Same as first author	UN Women	No mention	UN Women policy brief Series Briefs,	Policy papers commentary	No mention	No mention	No mention
Global Education Monitoring Report Team	2014	No mention	France	Same as first author	Same as first author	UNESCO	No mention	Flagship report	Commentary	No mention	No mention	No mention
Bandiera	2018	No mention	No mention	Sulaiman	Same as first author	No mention	American Economic Journal: Applied Economics	Review Article	Analysis	No mention	No mention	No mention
International Labour Office	2011	Skills and Employability Department Employment Sector	Geneva, Switzerland	Same as first author	Same as first author	No mention	No mention	Policy Brief	Commentary	No mention	No mention	No mention
World Bank	2012	No mention	No mention	Same as first author	Same as first author	World Bank	No mention	Brief	Review of literature	No mention	No mention	No mention
Sandys	2007	No mention	New York, US	Same as first author	Same as first author	UN Women	No mention	Report	Commentary	No mention	No mention	No mention
UN Women	N/A	No mention	No mention	Same as first author	Same as first author	UN Women	No mention	Brief	Commentary	No mention	No mention	No mention

First Author	Year	Institution affiliation of first author	Country of affiliation of the first author	Last name of corresponding author	Country of affiliation of the corresponding author	Collaboration between academics or non-academic (NGOs)	Name of journal	Type of publication	Study design	Year study was conducted	Statement on conflict of interest	Ethical approval
World Bank	2020	No mention	Washington, US	Same as first author	Same as first author	World Bank	No mention	Brief	Commentary	No mention	No mention	No mention
Babacar Fall	2007	No mention	No mention	Same as first author	Same as first author	World Bank	No mention	SURVEY OF ICT AND EDUCATION IN AFRICA: DR Congo Country Report	Commentary	No mention	No mention	No mention
World Bank	2020	No mention	No mention	Same as first author	Same as first author	World Bank	No mention	Brief	Commentary	No mention	No mention	No mention
Kabeer	2002	Institute of Development Studies University of Sussex	UK	Same as first author	Same as first author	No mention	Development and Change, International Institute of Social Studies	Article Review	Analysis	No mention	No mention	No mention

Appendix D: Research Characteristics

First Author	Year	Educational Benefit	Title	Empowerment Quote
Lewin	2012	Monograde pedagogy is ill suited to mixed age classrooms and there is a pressing need to ensure that this is discussed more.	Who gets what? Is improved access to basic education pro-poor in Sub-Saharan Africa?	No mention
Omwami	2015	Expanding education opportunities for women enhances their labour market opportunities contributing to their economic empowerment and spouse dependency to access spaces not readily available to them.	Intergenerational comparison of education attainment and implications for empowerment of women in rural Kenya	“The findings from this analysis demonstrate that perhaps a focus on secondary and higher education access may be more empowering for the women than the limited focus on basic education that is dominant in development circles.”
Raj	2019	Education increases girls’ self-efficacy. Participants in both India and Ethiopia noted the value of education in terms of supporting girls to have increased perceived and actual self-efficacy to be able to value themselves, develop, and self-actualise their own goals and manage their lives.	Students and brides: A qualitative analysis of the relationship between girls’ education and early marriage in Ethiopia and India	“The educated girls make their own future. The uneducated are like “bandhi hui gai” (like a cow tied to a pole) who is dependent on in-laws and her husband. “
Walker	2017	PAR enhances a sense of lifelong learning, by allowing the participants to use the practical skills gained and empowering them as change agents through knowledge about inequalities, and their implementing this knowledge in their careers and future selves.	Transformative change in higher education through PAR: A capabilities analysis	“Project participants aspired to be change agents in their communities, which could have been motivated by the low socio-economic environments they reside in, as well as feeling responsible to ‘give’ back’ to their communities as part of the minority who are able to access higher education. “
Jones	2015	Peer relationships were an important aspect to their educational journey. This was the ability to work as a human being, exercise practical reasons and enter into meaningful relationships. This promoted self-confidence that benefits health and wellbeing.	Post primary education and capabilities: Insights from young women in rural Uganda	“The ability to help family members was another way that the participants experience agency freedom: ‘When I get money, used to help my mother through giving her some basic needs and also I used to take care when they are sick’ (Gelly)... “
Wiggins	2012	Interventions to education should be carefully constructed and maintain strict fidelity to popular education philosophy and methodology. Transformative education is the redistribution of power from privileged groups to oppressed groups. This also includes incorporating informal and indigenous knowledge into our narrow framework of what education is.	Popular education for health promotion and community empowerment: A review of the literature	“The ultimate goal of empowerment in this model, congruent with popular education, is the creation of just and equitable social, economic and political relationships at every level of society and along every axis of diversity. “
Stromquist	2015	Formal education is still not there in terms of its potential for transformation for students. The strict academic achievement targets which are linked to reading, maths	Women’s empowerment and education: Linking knowledge to transformative action	“Programmes that have empowering consequences for women are those that provide a safe space, foster discussion, and encourage participants to think critically about gender

		and science and rather than life skills. The relevance and narrow construct to formal education is preventing transformation.		social norms; they also support individual agency and group cohesion “
Wilson-Strydom	2015	Quality education in its most condensed form needs to ensure that students can participate and feel confident. Education needs to give students self-confidence and the necessary tools, not just academically but also in terms of emotional and social capital so they flourish and become empowered.	A capabilities-friendly conceptualisation of flourishing in and through education	“We see an example of commitment beyond personal wellbeing in Andrew’s comments in Extract 3 about his vision for a bright future in which he is sufficiently well off to be able to exercise his agency as a teacher to make a difference in young people’s lives. He also reflects on how his new experiences in HE is helping him to become a better person. “
Dejaeghere	2016	The emotional aspect to learning fosters a self-confidence in students which translates to social capital. The projection of alternative futures develops from supportive bonds between students and student teacher relationships. This explodes with creativity, the acquisition of new skills, and economic empowerment.	Broadening educational outcomes: Social relations, skills development, and employability for youth	“In addition, these outings provide youth expanded opportunities to make social connections and foster their imaginations, which in turn serve to motivate and guide them. “
Valdes-Cotera	2018	The need to broaden education so that it is embedded into the culture of urban cities. Life-wide and life-long learning support sustainability and engage a transformative learning approach.	Realising lifelong learning for all: Governance and partnerships in building sustainable learning cities	“They show, in the pursuit of sustainable development, the necessities of extending learning opportunities inside and outside of the school system and the actions that can be taken to infuse learning into the entire life of a city. “
Lloyd	2009	Primary school enrolment in SSA demonstrates that some countries which rank as very poor have had impressive gains. The link in literacy and job opportunities is crucial for the expansion of education for all.	Educational inequalities in the midst of persistent poverty: Diversity across Africa in educational outcomes	No mention
Blaak	2013	Non-formal education and its flexible and relevant instruction present an opportunity to develop students in life skills and incorporate bilingual teaching, which increases learning gains.	Non-formal vocational education in Uganda: Practical empowerment through a workable alternative	“Despite the ambitions of the early school leavers diminish after learning school, through participation in the two programmes and the learning environment herein: their ambitions seem to be restored. Together with some concrete ideas of how to achieve them. “
Nkechinyere Amadi	2011	The technological development in the current education system has opened the doors for distance education. Technology has the potential to overcome barriers to girls’ education such as safety issues, access, and poor-quality education.	Access and success: The role of distance education in girl-child education in Nigeria	“For the girl-child to develop her full potential, she needs to be nurtured in an enabling environment, where her spiritual, intellectual and material needs for survival, protection and development are met and equal rights safeguarded. “
Shah	2011	‘Space’ which is a unique feature of the KGBV school, is a place of self-reflection and social bonding. The pedagogical approaches of the KGBV school are focused	Girl’s education and discursive spaces for empowerment: Perspectives from rural India	“The opportunity to have this space and use it is crucial to the development of intrinsic empowerment – the growth of an individual’s autonomy, self-confidence, awareness and

		on the empowerment of girls. This is not to elicit an unrealistic departure from the girls' lives, but to equip them to face their reality in a much more confident and assured manner.		strength – for both teachers and students at the KGBV school. “
Dejaeghere	2011	Community support and that of parents were important aspects and motivators for children to continue in their education. The outcomes of education were factors closely linked to economic expansion. Furthermore, safety and financial issues deterred some students from continuing their learning.	What matters for marginalised girls and boys in Bangladesh: A capabilities approach for understanding educational wellbeing and empowerment	“Despite gender parity in access to schools having been achieved, this study reveals that being safe and free from violence affects the educational wellbeing of girls and boys. School as a safe space is critical not only for these children to attend classes, but also to learn and to play with other children. “
Seeberg	2014	Education allowed students to gain voice and agency, as they began to foster social relations and grow in confidence. The students were able to voice their opinions about important aspects of their lives, like marrying early, the desire to continue with their studies, and how many children they wanted to have. There was the projection of an alternative future.	Girl's schooling empowerment in rural China: Identifying capabilities and social change in the village	“Gained freedoms included enjoying eider social contact, support, and nurturance; entertaining a chance of being able to fulfil their aspirations to live a modern, urban life; growing levels of confidence, cognitive and psychological control; and converting these resources into feasible life trajectories. Instrumentally they began acquiring political and economic status in their families; for many, schooling empowerment could not overcome the demands of poverty. “
Zhao	2011	The paternalistic aspect to education and empowerment constricts the agency of members of minority groups and their meaningful integration, if their worth is related to an economic commodity.	Empowerment in a socialist egalitarian agenda: Minority women in China's higher education system	“The case of ethnic Mongols in China suggests that collective empowerment is probably a condition of individual empowerment, and the latter is not taken for granted outcome of the former. “
Acharya	2017	The inclusion of informal knowledge and indigenous practices creates a completely different starting point as opposed to the concept of a 'deficit' of knowledge.	Women, literacy and health: Comparing health and education sectoral approaches in Nepal	“The emphasis is however on imparting modern knowledge and skills related to reproductive health and childcare – 'preaching' what to do or what should be done, and offering no space to discuss indigenous health practices or knowledges “
Shah	2016	The partnership relationship with national education programmes needs to be supported by the government. Teachers need to be trained and allowed to experiment and also develop in their own empowerment and fulfilment.	Partnerships and appropriation: Translating discourses of access and empowerment in girls' education in India	“According to the then Director of the GPEP, empowerment is a tow-fold process where local themes are incorporated to help the girls develop a more positive self-image, recognise the types of marginalising practices that occur locally, and imagine changes in terms of practices that can happen locally.
UN Women	2012	ICT training has allowed rural women to develop new skills and form networks. This learning has given them a new sense of confidence and self-reliance.	ICT training opens windows of opportunity for rural Women	“One of the most important things that computers have brought to the lives of Angelita and Rosa is independence, and confidence in their abilities and their futures. “

UN Women	2018	The CODE initiative is designed to develop digital literacy, coding and personal development skills, whilst at the same time providing a social environment in girl only camps.	Meet the African girls who are coding to make a difference.	The African Girls can CODE initiative uses a “spart interest “approach to attract young girls towards coding at early stages, when they are contemplating about future careers. Upon completing the programme, participants have the knowledge, skills and competencies to forge careers in ICT. It also equips each girl with enterprise know-how, to ensure their financial security. “
UN Women	2013	The co-educational curriculum allows all members of the community to participate and reflect on the root issues of violence against women.	Launch of pioneering non-formal curriculum to end violence against women and girls	“The new curriculum stems from the understanding that prevention should start early in life, when values and norms around gender equality are formed, by educating girls and boys about respectful relationships and gender equality. “
Jones	2019	Cash transfers and in-kind transfers that are attached to a specific knowledge have a greater impact on girls’ enrolment.	Gender and age-responsive social protection: The potential of cash transfers to advance adolescent rights and capabilities	“More specifically, the authors found cash reduces sexual exploitation, sexual violence and intimate partner violence – particularly for girls – in part because it reduces adolescents’ engagement with transactional sex. “
UN Women	2014	Bilingual education allows for the inclusion of children from ethnic and linguistic minorities. These learning gains are strengthened when community teachers are deployed.	Education for all monitoring report 2013/14: Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all	“For children from ethnic and linguistic minorities to acquire strong foundation skills, schools need to teach the curriculum in a language children understand. A bilingual approach that combines continued teaching in a child’s mother tongue with the introduction of a second language can improve performance in the second language as well as in other subjects. “
Bandiera	2018	These safe spaces for girls in the form of clubs have been successful in reaching school drop-outs as well. The hard vocational and soft life skills have led to substantial economic empowerment and control over their bodies.	Women’s empowerment in action: Evidence from a randomised control trial in Africa.	“Our results show that four years post-intervention, the bundled provision of hard vocational and soft life soft life skills through the programme leads to substantial advances in economic empowerment and control over the body for adolescent girls in treated communities relative to girls in control communities. “
International Labour Office	2011	Apprentice training programmes have been shown to be very effective in terms of economic empowerment. Primarily the incentives and job outcomes from receiving vocational training.	Increasing the employability of disadvantaged youth	No mention
World Bank	2012	Economic empowerment programmes are strengthened by the vocational skills training. Programmes like EPAG can also indirectly bring about positive behaviour changes as participants receive life-skills training.	Can skills training programmes increase employment for young women? The case of Liberia	“The EPAG experience validates the importance of delivering business skills training along with hon and life-skills training in contexts where wage employment is limited “.

Sandys	2007	To participate in sport education and physical activity and recreation allows women of all ages to develop decision-making skills.	Women, gender equality, and sport	“Sport can be an important tool for social empowerment through the skills and values learned, such as teamwork, negotiation, leadership, communication and respect for others. “
UN Women	N/A	The VSS provides its participants with new learning through technology. Intersectionality across targeted groups of women and girls can be taken into account in the curriculum development.	Virtual Skills School	No mention
World Bank	2020	The community-based programmes teach life-skills training and effective vocational training. This relevant education combined with its social element has been shown to be transformative in the lives of girls.	GIL top policy lessons on empowering adolescent girls: Gender Innovation Lab	“Creating safe spaces for girls to receive job or life-skills trainings that are tailored to an adolescent girl’s environment and experiences has been shown to be effective across a variety of contexts. “
Babacar Fall	2007	ICT training is an opportunity to enhance economic empowerment and digital literacy.	ICT in education in the Democratic Republic of Congo	No mention
World Bank	2020	Girls’ spaces for teaching relevant instruction for girls creates a desirable learning environment. Girls’ confidence and self-efficacy grow with mentorship and supportive bonds.	Africa Gender Innovation Lab	“The programme had positive impacts on income and on girls’ decision-making power over childbearing, marriage, and sexual activity. Mentors can play a positive role in girls’ lives, helping them to transition into adolescence and adulthood, adopt healthy behaviours, build confidence and self-esteem, and navigate decisions about schooling, employment, and fertility. At critical junctures in girls’ development, mentors can help to nudge them in positive directions. “
Kabeer	2002	The ability to make meaningful choices is an important component of empowerment. Teaching skills can elevate voice and agency.	Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women’s empowerment	“As far as empowerment is concerned, we are interested in possible inequalities in people’s capacity to make choices rather than in differences in the choices they make. An observed lack of uniformity in functioning achievements cannot be automatically interpreted as evidence of inequality because it is highly unlikely that all members of a given society will give equal value to different possible ways of ‘being and doing’. Consequently, where gender differentials in functioning achievements exist, we have to disentangle differentials which reflect differences in preferences from those which embody a denial of choice. “

Appendix E: Department of Health Sciences Ethics Approval



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16 November 2020

Mrs Claudia Adler
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Dear Claudia

HSRGC/2020/409/F: Empowerment through education

Thank you for today's email, including the updated submission and study documents.

I am pleased to confirm that the study now has HSRGC approval, pending taking up the following points in supervision.

1. The Information Sheets (IS) and Consent Forms (CF) need to be thoroughly proofread to edit out typos.
2. On the virtual community IS, I don't think you need the subheading, 'Virtual Community', under, 'Why have I been asked to participate?'
3. On the virtual community IS, you should clarify that the virtual community can withdraw from the study if either the Chair or the members choose to (the way it's currently worded sounds as though only the Chair can decide to withdraw).
4. On both IS, under, 'What are the advantages or benefits of taking part?', you could add something about helping to contribute to this important empowerment agenda (adding this might help with recruitment).
5. On both IS, the sentences under, 'What will happen to the results of the study?' can be reworded, e.g.: 'The results of the study will be included in my academic thesis and may be disseminated at conferences and meetings of professional associations, and published in scholarly journals and policy briefs'.
6. Both IS say, 'Communications regarding this research will only come through the University of York email address of the researcher (cmcz500@york.ac.uk)' but then you give a different email address under, 'Who do I contact for more information about the study?' (you should use the York email address, not a personal one.)

I am happy for you to take up these points in supervision and do not require to see the submission again. But if anything is unclear or you need further advice, please get in touch. In the meantime, thank you for engaging so positively with the HSRGC requirements and good luck with the study.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Holland

Chair: HSRGC

cc: Dr J Jayawickrama, Dr J Rose

Appendix F: Semi-Structures Questions

Semi-Structured Questions

Interviews:

(A) Personal encounters on the journey of seeking empowerment through education

(B) Policy makers on empowerment through education

A) Personal accounts on the journey seeking empowerment through education

a) Does mainstream education develop you to your fullest potential?

- Can you talk me through your schooling experience?
- What language were you educated in? and was this your mother tongue?
- How did school make you feel?
- How were you mainly taught in school, and did you enjoy it?
- What did you most like about school and why?
- What did you dislike about school and why?
- What did you learn in school that you think was vital?
- What would you consider as not being useful in your schooling experience?
- Did you learn about girls and women's health and well-being at school?
- Do you think school equipped you with everything you needed to know about life?
- What do you wish you had been taught in school?

4.

b) How did non-formal and informal education prepare you for life?

- What are the greatest lessons that you have learnt in life? And did you learn them in a classroom?
- How did you discover what you wanted to be in life?
- What tools have you learnt from your family and community that you apply today?
- What lessons have you passed on to your family members?

- Have you engaged in other learning programmes?
- Do you learn from mentors and family or community leaders? If yes, what have you learnt?
- How did you learn to become confident?
- How did you learn about health and well-being?
- What has helped you reach your goals in life?

c) What learning approaches are the most empowering?

- Who have been your greatest teachers in life and why?
- Can you describe a learning experience which has been the most empowering?
- How do you learn?
- How do you teach?

B) Policy Interviews on education through empowerment

a) What changes are needed in our education system to facilitate the empowerment of women and girls from marginalised and rural backgrounds?

- What changes would you like to see in our education system and why?
- How is technology changing the way we learn?
- How do you envisage our education system in 5 and in 10 years from now?
- What should our school system incorporate for more girls to achieve empowerment?
- What policies are transforming our schooling system for the better?
- How can policies become more pro-poor?

b) How can our education system be more inclusive?

- Individual learning and one's maternal language is rarely taken into account in our mainstream education system, what policies are there that are working with a child's mother tongue and ethnic backgrounds?
- How can empowerment through education be promoted in our education system?
- Non-formal and informal learning lacks accreditation, how can policies help remedy this?
- Do you think our education system holds racial and sexist's biases?
- Lack of resources and financial pressures hurt families from rural and marginalised communities, how are policies closing the financial divide?

- How are policies promoting quality education for all?
 - How are policies developing teachers into becoming mentors and guides?
- 5.

c) How can our education system promote the health and well-being of girls and women?

- Are policies tackling the mental issues surging from formal education?
- What learning approaches are being implemented to promote health and well-being?
- Why is happiness, confidence and empowerment not part of a global curriculum?
- Can greater support for creativity and entrepreneurial education increase health and well-being?
- Is support and mentoring systems important for the health and well-being of girls and women?

Abbreviations and Glossary

AAMC	Association of American Medical Colleges
AGRA	Alliance for a Green Evolution in Africa
AHAU	A political rulership title from the Maya civilization
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ALBA	The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our Americas
BMC	Biomedical Central
BNF	British Nutrition Foundation
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CDR	The neighbourhood Committees for the Defence of the Revolution
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
EBSCO	British Education Index
EPAG	Economic Empowerment for Adolescent Girls
FSP	Female Stipend Programme
GNP	Gross nations product
GPEP	General Practice Education Performance
HDCA	Human Development Capabilities Association
HR	Human Resource
HSE	Health and Safety Report
HSRGC	Health Sciences Research Governance Committee
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
INEE	Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies

INGO	International non-governmental organisations
JBI	Joanna Briggs Institute
KGBV	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya
LGBTQI	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people
LLB	Bachelor of Laws
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NT	Neurotransmitters
ODL	Open and distance learning
OECD	the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONS	Office of National Statistics
PAR	Participatory action research
PISA	The Programme for International Student Assessment
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for systematic review and Meta-Analysis
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorders
RGC	Research Governance Committee
SAD	Standard American Diet
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPIDER	Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, Research
SSA	Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
VSS	Virtual Skills School
WEF	World Economic Forum

WHO World Health Organisation

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