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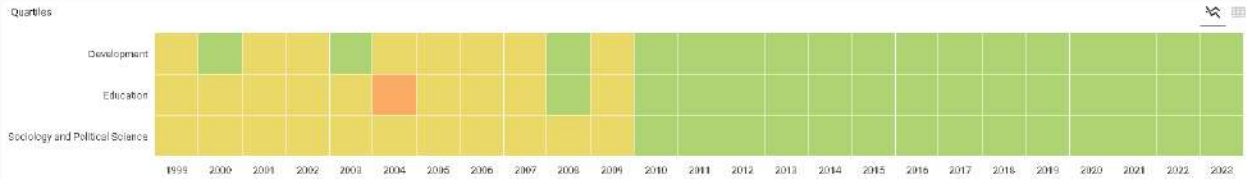| PUBLICATION TYPE	ISSN	COVERAGE	INFORMATION
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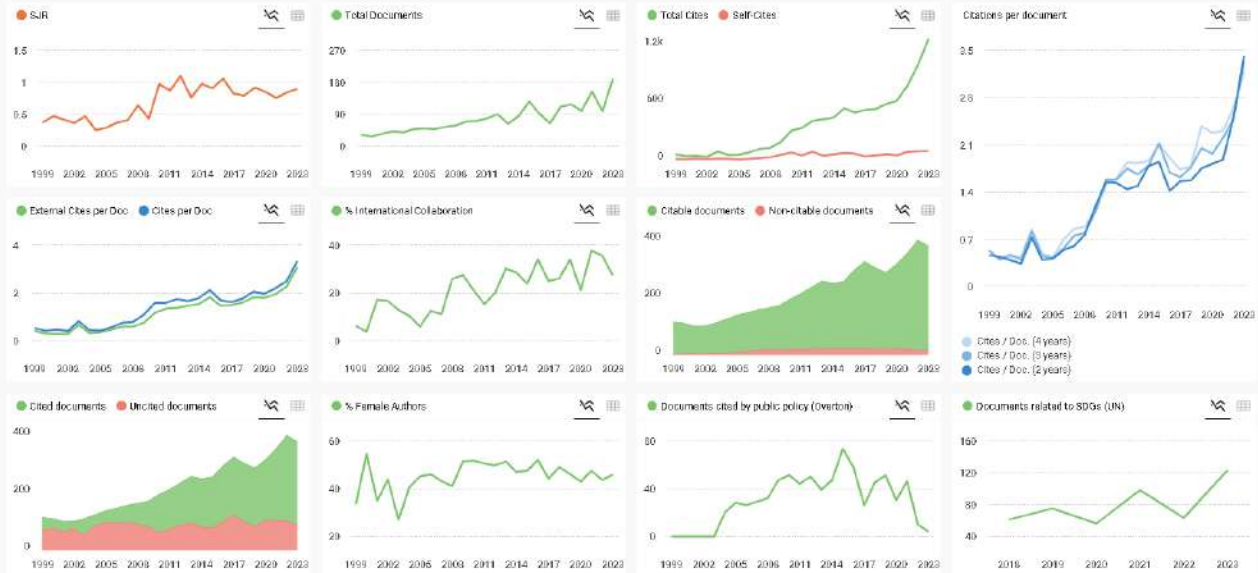
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A Creative Dramatics Based Strategy to Enhance Al-Azhar Primary Institute Pupils' EFL Reading Comprehension and Attitudes.

Benjamin Nour El-Din Attyia Ghonim
Faculty of Education, Zagazig University, Egypt

Abstract
The current study aimed at enhancing Al-Azhar primary institute pupils' EFL reading comprehension and attitudes through a creative dramatics based strategy. The study adopted the quasi-experimental pre-post test and scale, experimental/control groups. Participants were sixth year Al-Azhar primary institute pupils. Two groups (20 each) were selected in the academic year 2019-2020. The experimental group was taught through a creative dramatics based strategy for enhancing their reading comprehension and attitudes. On the other hand, the control group received regular instruction. To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher designed a questionnaire for determining some reading comprehension skill and a scale for determining some aspects of reading attitudes approved by a panel of jury. Based on these reading comprehension skills and aspects of reading attitudes, a pre-post reading comprehension test and a scale were designed. The results of the study indicated that EFL reading comprehension skills and attitudes of the experimental group enhanced. The results of the study were positive; the hypotheses were accepted.
Key words: reading comprehension, Attitudes and Creative Dramatics.

Introduction:
Arican and Yilmaz (2010) defined the habit of reading as practicing the act of reading throughout life, constantly and critically as a result of perceiving reading as a need and a source of pleasure. Pupil-readers can enhance the skills of reading and gain the habit of reading mostly in primary school and it becomes difficult to gain this habit in adulthood.
Comprehension is the essence of reading and the active process of constructing meaning from a text. Reading comprehension is a complex interaction among automatic and strategic cognitive processes that enables the pupil-reader to create a mental representation of the text. Comprehension depends not only on the characteristics of the pupil-readers, such as prior knowledge and working memory, but also on language procedures, such as basic reading skills, decoding, vocabulary, sensitivity to text structure, inferencing, and motivation (Van den Broek

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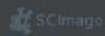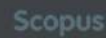
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International Journal of Educational Development

Expanding primary school completion through culturally responsive and sustaining education: Evidence from a historical project in Sierra Leone
--Manuscript Draft--

EXPANDING PRIMARY SCHOOL COMPLETION THROUGH CRSE

Abstract:

This article takes an unconventional approach of empirically evaluating a historical UNESCO-funded educational development project in Sierra Leone. Grounded in principles of culturally responsive and sustaining education (CRSE), the Bunumbu project represented one of the largest investments in the 1970-80s to universalize primary education into rural sub-Saharan Africa. By combining a historical analysis with a difference-in-difference approach, this study uses national census data from thirty years after the project began to evaluate the effects of the Bunumbu project on primary school completion. Findings show that there was a 3.8%-point higher increase in primary completion rates in the Bunumbu project area than neighboring comparison chiefdoms.

Keywords: *sub-Saharan Africa; universal primary education; culturally relevant and responsive education; rural education*

1. Introduction

With the 2030 target deadline fast approaching, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Report 2023 shows that there has been international progress towards reaching the goal of ensuring all girls and boys complete primary education, however the pace has been uneven across regions of the world (United Nations, 2023). Whereas the primary completion rate nears or exceeds 90 percent for most of the world, indicators show that in sub-Saharan Africa, less than two-thirds of children complete primary school. This does not even take into account that only about one-third of children in the region reach a minimum proficiency level in reading by the end of primary school (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2024). Given the "last mile" challenge of enrolling the most difficult-to-reach children, some have estimated that it will take Africa more than 28 more years just to achieve universal primary education (Evans and Acosta, 2021), much less the goal of foundational learning proficiency.

Oketch recently argued that the SDG 4 targets in Africa have not sufficiently focused on the "conditions and circumstances" underlying education reforms (2024, p. 1), including the weak links in education systems such as mismatches between teaching, learning, and curriculum (see also Pritchett and Beatty, 2015). This article examines these linkages in a sub-Saharan African context by analyzing an educational development project aimed at increasing primary completion rates in post-independent, rural Sierra Leone through changes to teacher education and curricular reform. While conducting contemporary evaluations of educational policies or programs is a normative practice, few empirical studies evaluate the effects of a past project to glean historical lessons that can inform present-day discussions. Considering that the international community has sought to achieve universal primary education for more than fifty years (Klees, 2017), surprisingly little is known about the effect of previous attempts at

expanding education. Although some historical analyses have examined universalizing education in African contexts (Somerset, 2009; Zimmerman, 2008), this work is typically qualitative in nature; quantitative studies of the impact of past projects are rare. This study seeks to address this paucity in the literature by quantitatively evaluating a historical attempt to expand schooling through a culturally relevant education initiative called the Bunumbu project.

The Bunumbu project was an internationally-acclaimed, UNESCO-funded education and rural development program that ran in Sierra Leone from 1974 through the 1980s before civil war broke out in the country in 1991. Influenced by international discourse justifying the need for mass schooling, the newly independent state of Sierra Leone began in the 1960s to institute universal education policies that increasingly focused on adapting education to local and rural needs (Pai, 2013). At a time when the national primary school enrollment rate was less than 40% (see Figure 1), the Bunumbu project represented a novel approach to expand the quantity and quality of education in a rural area of Sierra Leone through three main programmatic elements: 1) altering the primary curriculum to make education more relevant to rural needs, 2) expanding and changing the model of teacher training programs, and 3) transforming primary schools into Community Education Centers that would also work to holistically develop local communities (UNESCO, 1983). However, despite positive program assessments hailing the successes of the project, a quantitative evaluation of the program's impact was never conducted.

Figure 1. Primary School Enrollment (% gross) from 1970 to 2020
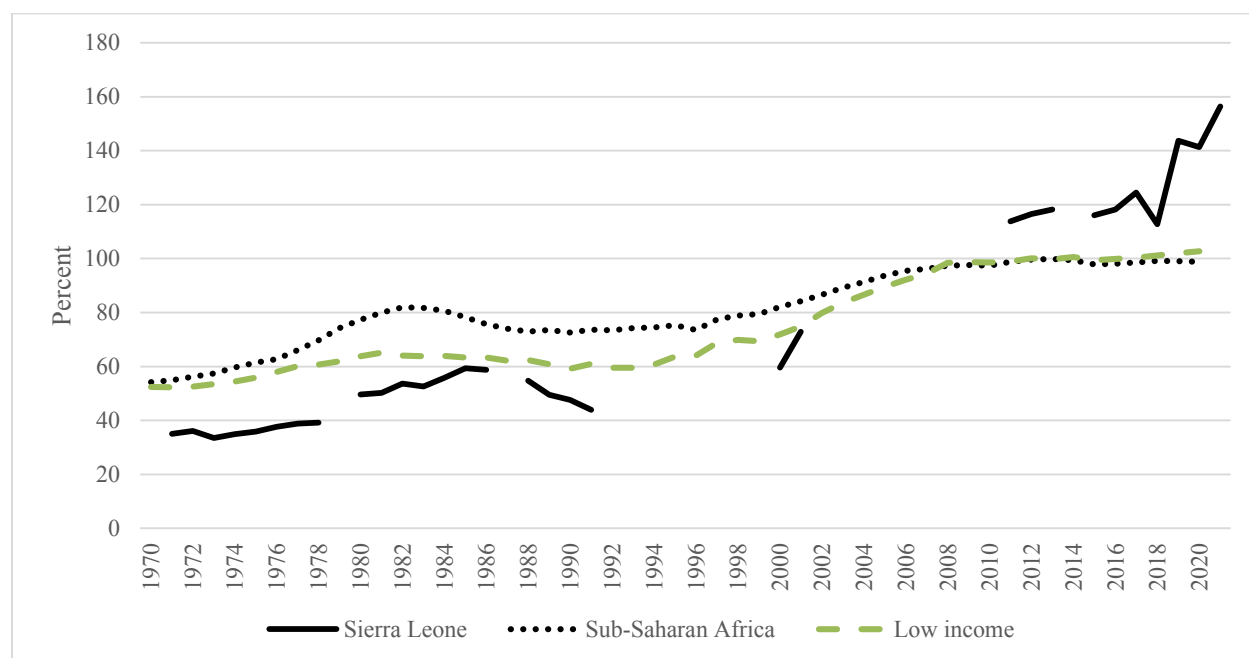
Source: Authors' representation based on World Bank microdata (World Bank, 2023). Gaps indicate years of missing data.

This article will proceed by first reviewing literature on culturally responsive and sustaining education to help frame a historical review of primary and secondary sources primarily from the UNESCO archives on the Bunumbu project's program design, before turning to methodology and results. By using a difference-in-difference model to analyze 2004 Sierra Leone Census data (which measures individual life outcomes 20-30 years after the project's implementation), results suggest a statistically significant, positive effect of the Bunumbu project on primary completion rates. The article concludes with a discussion of the study limitations and how this project compares to other contemporary international education interventions.

2. Review of literature on CRSE and the Bunumbu project

2.1 Culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining education

Since the 1970s, scholars in the United States such as James Banks and Sonia Nieto have advanced the field of multicultural education – a field that has challenged notions of educational

inequalities such as historically unequal resources, a dominant curriculum grounded in Eurocentrism, and teachers who were ill-prepared to teach students hailing from diverse backgrounds (Banks, 1981; Nieto, 2004). Rooted in empowering and affirming students' diversity as a means of fostering positive student achievement (Nieto, 2004), multicultural education in the US was initially conceived as a reform movement but was increasingly criticized for being "mired in liberal ideology that offers no radical change in the current order" (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995, p. 62). According to critics, multicultural education only amounted to trivial acts of curriculum inclusion, such as students eating ethnic foods or learning cultural songs and folktales, within a politically neutral environment of tolerance and respect for the co-existence of other cultures (ibid).

In contrast, Gloria Ladson Billing's (1995) seminal article on culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) called for directly addressing the systemic inequities underlying the continued academic failure of African American, Native American/Indigenous, and Hispanic students in the US. She argued for countering decades of education narratives built on a cultural deficit model of treating Black children as "at risk" students who needed to be remediated through compensatory educational interventions. Instead, she found in her landmark study that teachers who were successful in working with Black students built on students' academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. She argued that teachers should aim to "produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social order" (ibid, p. 474). Her contention that affirming students' cultural styles is not enough represented a radical departure from multicultural education. She argued that culturally relevant teaching must go further to help students recognize and critique social inequities through awareness and action.

Geneva Gay (2010) later built on CRP to call for a systemic paradigm shift of what she re-termed as culturally responsive teaching (CRT), in which education institutions teach to and through students' cultural knowledge and prior experiences. Specifically, she defined CRT as "the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to, and effective for them" (Gay, 2010, p. 31). In short, CRT differentiates itself from CRP by specifying the need to teach students "*through* their own cultural filters" (Gay, 2013, p. 50). She delineated four actions essential to the effective implementation of CRT: 1) restructuring dominant teachers' attitudes and beliefs which are typically rooted in pathological and deficient perceptions of minoritized students; 2) resisting the resistance that comes with CRT; 3) ensuring that teachers understand how and why culture and difference are essential to CRT; and 4) establishing pedagogical connections between CRT and all subjects and skills that are routinely taught in schools (ibid).

The field of cultural relevant and responsive education has continued to evolve since then. Django Paris (2012) wrote an influential essay in which he critiqued CRP and CRT for leading students towards culturally assimilating into a dominant monolingual, monocultural society. Instead, he called for a shift towards culturally sustaining pedagogy that explicitly resists the status quo by pluralistically sustaining students' linguistic and cultural heritage. Ethnic and linguistic differences should not only be passively seen as strengths, but they should also be actively maintained by supporting young people to sustain the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities, he argued. More recently, Gholdy Muhammad (2020) has also written about cultivating historically responsive literacy through developing not only Black and Brown children's identity, skills, intellect, and criticality, but also the importance of joy in education.

Given the wide variation in how much Gloria Ladson-Billing's original terminology of CRP has evolved over the last few decades, I opt throughout the remainder of this article to use the term culturally responsive and sustaining education (CRSE). Drawing on the work of Geneva Gay and Django Paris, I define CRSE as teaching students through their own cultural filters, backgrounds, and experiences to sustain their cultural heritage.

2.2 Application and impacts of CRSE

Although CRSE originated in the context of addressing educational inequities that African American and Hispanic students in the US face, CRSE has also been applied to First Nation student groups in the US, Canada, and New Zealand (Bishop et al., 2007; Castagno and Brayboy 2008; Lewthwaite and McMillan, 2010; Nicol et al., 2010). Moreover, the shift towards pushing education to not only be culturally relevant and responsive but to also be culturally sustaining parallels the slow integration of indigenous knowledge systems into education through counteressentialist means (Battiste and Henderson, 2009; Brayboy and Castagno, 2009; Brayboy and Maughan, 2009; Jacob et al., 2018; Kincheloe and Steinberg, 2008;). More recent research has also emerged extending CRSE to contexts ranging from working with students with disabilities in the United Arab Emirates, to Syrian refugee students in Turkey, to Aboriginal students in Australia, to non-native Finnish speakers in Finland, and to multilingual elementary learners in Papua New Guinea (Alisaari et al., 2023; Loyd et al., 2023; Kotluk and Aydin, 2021; Morrison et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2023).

A growing body of research has found a positive association between CRSE, student engagement, and academic learning; however these were initially small-scale case studies that did not examine the impact of CRSE on outcomes like student achievement (Sleeter, 2012). Even though Aronson and Laughter challenged the idea of focusing on test scores to evaluate the

impact of CRSE since standardized tests antithetically represent "an oppressive system based on 'Whitestream' curricula" (2016, p. 196), they nonetheless found in their research synthesis that CRSE has been associated with positive cognitive gains in test scores, as well as affective benefits like increased academic interest, self-perception, confidence, and motivation. A plethora of quasi-experimental studies have provided further causal evidence of CRSE's positive impact on student outcomes ranging from high-stakes exam scores, attendance, Grade Point Average, and credit accumulation (Cherfas et al., 2021; Dee and Penner, 2016). That said, few studies have examined the impacts of CRSE on school completion, particularly in the context of Africa. This study seeks to contribute towards filling this gap in knowledge by investigating the effects of the Bunumbu project on primary school completion rates.

2.3 Bunumbu project history

Although the Bunumbu project never directly referred to CRSE, the project design was deeply grounded in tenets of CRSE. Even prior to the project, a new national trial syllabus that was to be "more relevant to local and national needs" was issued in 1969 eight years after Sierra Leone gained independence (Hawes, 1976, p. 11). Under this new syllabus, third graders were to learn about the "local community as part of a larger unit" (ibid, 32). The *Sierra Leone National Development Plan 1974/75-1978/79* then released the following statement: "A substantial reduction of drop-outs in primary schools can only be achieved in the long run through more fundamental changes, e.g. by making primary education more relevant to the social and economic environment, especially the rural milieu where most of the children live" (World Bank Group Archives, 1979, p. 16).

Revising the traditional academic primary school curriculum to be "more responsive of local environment of school and to give greater emphasis to practical activities and community

participation" (World Bank Group Archives, 1979, p. 17) became the central focus of the

Bunumbu project, which officially began in 1974. The project involved the creation of over 300

new teaching units with corresponding books, workbooks, and guidesheets (some in the local

Mende language) that integrated the Institute of Education's national curricula with the local

environment and culture of Bunumbu (World Bank Group Archives, 1979; UNESCO and

UNDP, 1983). Teaching units were created thematically. Mathematics units covered formal

content topics like sets and rational numbers, while language arts units juxtaposed lessons like

"reading short passages in English" with "reading stories of heroes/heroines in the community

language" (UNESCO and UNDP, 1983, p. 35). Similarly, science units ranged from "forces that

move objects" to "what weather can do for us" (ibid, p. 41).

Teachers also received pre-service and in-service training at the local Bunumbu Teachers

College "to sensitize [them] to the needs of the rural environment in which their schools are

located" (UNESCO, 1977, p. 18). They specifically received training on rural development

studies comprised of agriculture, home economics, basic crafts, and community development

(UNESCO and UNDP, 1983). Notably, "teachers were involved both in writing curricula and in

the evaluation process – a sharp break from the practice at other schools, where curricula are

imposed entirely from the top" (Banya, 1986, p. 101). Skills development tasks within the

teacher certificate course included creating maps of Sierra Leone and Bunumbu, recording

rainfall and examining nearby water sources, constructing poultry farms and vegetable gardens,

and collecting soil samples from local oil palm plantations (Bunumbu Teachers College, 1981).

Teachers even made periodic visits to family farms to discuss new ideas about farming (Banya,

1986).

The project sought to also transform the new primary schools into Community Education Centers that provided adult education workshops on health, nutrition, blacksmithing, weaving, handicrafts, and woodwork (Banya, 1986; Lemoine, 1985). Each center was run by a Community Development Council that was comprised of community leaders including the Paramount Chief, local chiefs, school headmasters, parents, teachers college students, and staff who together discussed common interests like mechanization of rice production (UNESCO and UNDP, 1983; Faherty, 1987). Notably, Bunumbu residents were recruited and engaged both in creating, teaching, and participating in these non-formal education programs (Banya, 1986).

The first pilot phase of the Project ran from 1974-1982, followed by an inter-phase from 1983-85 that focused on strategizing the dissemination of the project, with the last phase in 1985-1990 consisting of actually expanding and disseminating the project.[1] The pilot project was administered in 4 out of the total 14 chiefdoms of the eastern district of Kailahun in Sierra Leone.[2] Throughout the 1980s and even early 1990s, the Bunumbu project was widely hailed by educators and those in the international development field as a successful model of a non-formal and rural education program (Banya, 1986). Project evaluations show that twenty pilot primary schools were constructed, which prompted student enrollment to rise from 3,668 in 1973-74 to 6,414 in 1982-83 (Banya, 1989, p. 116). Concomitant with the increased enrollment was an increase in pass rates on the national common entrance exam – a test administered at the end of primary school – from 68% to 78% (ibid, p. 115). Project reports even showed that female student enrollment increased from 14 out of 300 students in 1975 to 75-80 out of 300 students in

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[1] Due to the civil war, as well as other factors such as a loss of international and state funding, the scope of the project waned over time. The project area was coincidentally where the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) soldiers first entered Sierra Leone from Liberia in the beginning of the civil war in 1991. The Bunumbu Teachers' College, the main site of the Bunumbu project, later became one of the war camps for the RUF. Bunumbu is also only about 15 miles from the diamond mines that funded the conflict.
[2] Chiefdoms are an administrative unit larger than villages but smaller than a district.

1982, resulting in about 25% of students in each class being female (UNESCO and UNDP, 1983, p. 14).

Qualitative interview data from reports also showed headmasters providing positive feedback of the program improving test scores on the national common entrance exam taken at the end of primary school. As one headmaster said in an interview: "'The Bunumbu materials have definitely helped improve our common entrance results...More of my pupils are now going to various secondary schools all over the country' (Headmaster 809)" (Banya, 1986, p. 114). Project reports also indicated that "teachers noted the enthusiasm of pupils for the so-called 'practical subjects' and reacted favourably to the inclusion of these subjects in what had been a traditional primary curriculum" (UNESCO and UNDP, 1983, p. 19). Furthermore, there was "more pupil participation when the teaching units were written in, or called for, the use of the community language" (ibid). Apart from academic outcomes, project findings showed that village elders surveyed by the Institute of Education reported more pupils being cooperative and willing to work on family farms and community development activities.

Despite the overall positive assessment of the project by UNESCO in 1983, it was noted that: "it is difficult to discuss the impact of the project on the community without a socioeconomic survey of Bunumbu" (Banya, 1986, p. 182). Later evaluations also suggested generally positive outcomes from the project's model of integrating schools and teacher training into the community, though there was wide variation in terms of project sustainability (Bockarie, 1991). This study attempts to reopen the question of the project's longer-term impact on life outcomes, particularly on primary school completion.

3. Methods

3.1 Data

This study purposefully uses the cross-sectional 2004 Sierra Leone Census[3] dataset for two reasons: 1) the dataset captures a long-term effect of the Bunumbu project since it reports individual outcomes 20-30 years after the implementation of the project, and 2) the dataset contains a variable that records the chiefdom[4] where individuals resided in 1990 which can be used as a treatment assignment. This date is critical since it approximates the time of the end of the Bunumbu Project, as well as individuals' places of residence before the civil war began in 1991 that led to mass displacement. That said, this variable assumes that there was little mobility between when 1990 and when the project began waning in the late 1980s. However, a check for mobility shows very little movement of people from where they were born, versus where they resided in 1990, and even where they resided in 2004 at the time when the Census was taken. For example, everyone out of the 2,978 people who lived in the Bunumbu project chiefdoms was born in the project area.[5] The sample was thus restricted to individuals who in 1990 resided in the Kailahun district in which Bunumbu is located (see Figure 2). Individuals whose age was either missing or under 24 years of age were dropped from the sample, on the grounds that those who were 24 at the time of the 2004 Census would have been born in 1980 and would not have had enough time to enroll in and finish primary school before the start of the civil war in 1991.

Figure 2. Map of Bunumbu in Sierra Leone

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[3] The dataset is publicly available from Integrated Public Use Microdata Series International (IPUMS International).

[4] Chiefdoms are an administrative unit larger than villages but smaller than a district. Bunumbu is considered the headquarter of the Kpeje West chiefdom.

[5] There are, however, 157 people who were not in the Bunumbu area in 1990 but were born there. This was not too much of a concern however because, assuming the Bunumbu project has a positive effect, the fact that people who were potentially "treated" are erroneously coded into the control group would only underestimate the treatment effect.
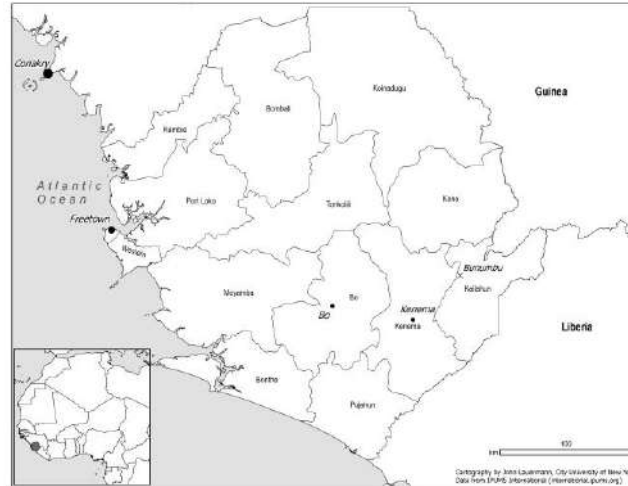
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From this sample, individuals who stated their 1990 residence as one of the four chiefdoms where the pilot of the Bunumbu project was implemented – Kpeje (or Peje) West (Bunumbu), Kpeje (or Peje) Bongre, Yawei and Njaluahun (World Bank Group Archives, 1979) – were assigned to be in the "treatment" group (see solid outline in Figure 3). Rather than defining the control group as everyone else from the other 10 chiefdoms in Kailahun, only 6 of the 10 chiefdoms were considered as "controls" (see dashed outline in Figure 3). The 4 chiefdoms of Luawa, Kissi Tongi, Kissi Kama, and Kissi Teng were not considered for the control group since they were larger in population (with Luawa being the chiefdom where the district headquarter is) and were also the chiefdoms farthest from Bunumbu, which would result in more geographical, cultural, and other unobservable differences. This ultimately created a treatment group of n=3,463, in comparison with a control group of n=4,960.

Figure 3. Map of chiefdoms in Kailahun district

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sierra-Leone-Kailahun-District-chiefdoms.png

Summary statistics (see Table 1) showed that while there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of gender, there were significant differences in ethnicity at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level. Specifically, in comparison with the control group, the Bunumbu treatment group had more Mendes (the dominant ethnicity in the district of Kailahun) and Christians, as opposed to Kissis and Muslims. Compared to the control group, the treatment group also had statistically significantly ($\alpha = 0.05$) higher rates of completing primary, junior secondary, and secondary school, as well as higher rates of being literate, speaking English, and being service rather than agricultural workers.

Table 1. Summary statistics comparing individuals who were and were not exposed to the Bunumbu project

	Neighboring control group	Bunumbu treatment group	Difference of means	Standard Error
Male	0.46	0.44	0.02	0.01
Mende	0.87	0.92	-0.05*	0.01
Kissi	0.04	0.01	0.03*	0.00
Muslim	0.83	0.71	0.12*	0.01
Christian	0.16	0.28	-0.12*	0.01

Other religion	0.01	0.01	0.01*	0.00
Completed primary	0.19	0.23	-0.04*	0.01
Completed JSS	0.08	0.12	-0.03*	0.01
Completed secondary	0.02	0.04	-0.02*	0.00
Literate	0.23	0.28	-0.05*	0.01
Speaks English	0.02	0.03	-0.01*	0.00
Age	41.69	41.90	-0.21	0.35
Unemployed	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.00
Service worker	0.06	0.08	-0.03*	0.01
Agriculture worker	0.53	0.38	0.15*	0.01
N	4,960	3,463		

NOTE: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$. N=4,960 for the control group except for: 1) completion of primary, junior secondary school (JSS), and secondary where n=4,896. N=3,463 for the Bunumbu treatment group except for 1) completion of primary, JSS, and secondary where n=3,422.

3.2 Empirical strategy

The objective of this study is to estimate the effect of the Bunumbu project on primary completion rates. Did the project produce the positive impacts that were reported in qualitative evaluations? An impact analysis, however, is complicated by the fact that participation was not randomly assigned, and that the intervention took place many years ago. Despite the absence of such a randomized study and panel data of outcomes, there are still possible strategies to measure the effect of the program, albeit it with various sets of assumptions.

One approach would be to simply compare average post-project outcomes for the treatment versus control areas. However, there were vast differences between the two project areas, such as the early introduction of Western education in Bunumbu by the Methodist Mission and Church Missionary Society in the 1920-30s (Awoko Publications, 2015; Pai, 2013; Tuchscherer, 1998), which would confound the effect of the Bunumbu project. Another approach would be to compare mean outcomes for the Bunumbu project area before and after the project occurred. This difference in outcomes, however, could be a result of many factors besides the Bunumbu project, such as other national policies aimed at increasing primary attendance and completion during this time that affected the entire country.

This study thus uses a difference-in-difference (DID) estimation strategy that combines the two approaches to estimate what the counterfactual *would have been* in the Bunumbu project area absent the implementation of the program. A DID regression relies on identifying a treatment and control group to then compare the outcomes of the two groups before and after an intervention, typically as measured by time. Accordingly, the Bunumbu project can be considered a "natural experiment" that created random exposure to an education intervention along two dimensions: 1) geographically, people living in the project area would have been impacted more than those living outside of the project area, and 2) temporally, individuals in different age cohorts were differentially exposed to the project.[6] Namely, older individuals would have been too old to have gained access to the new primary schools and curricular materials that came along with the project. Through these two dimensions, the DID model distinguishes between four groups of individuals:

1. Residents of Bunumbu who are age-appropriate (the treatment group)

2. Residents of Bunumbu who are older than the treatment group

3. Residents of neighboring chiefdoms who are the same age as the treatment group

4. Residents of neighboring chiefdoms who are older than the treatment group

DID thus evaluates the treatment effect through two equivalent estimators:

$$\hat{\tau} = \left(\bar{Y}_1^{a_1} - \bar{Y}_1^{a_0}\right) - \left(\bar{Y}_0^{a_1} - \bar{Y}_0^{a_0}\right) \quad (1)$$

$$\hat{\tau} = \left(\bar{Y}_1^{a_1} - \bar{Y}_0^{a_1}\right) - \left(\bar{Y}_1^{a_0} - \bar{Y}_0^{a_0}\right) \quad (2)$$

where $\hat{\tau}$ represents the estimate of the treatment effect; $\bar{Y}_1$ represents the mean outcome in the Bunumbu project treatment area while $\bar{Y}_0$ represents the mean outcome for the neighboring

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[6] By using *age*, this model slightly departs from traditional DID analyses that uses panel data to compare outcomes between the treatment and control group across *time*, where the year a policy or program came into effect is represented as a dummy variable that denotes pre- and post-program.

control area; and a_1 represents the age cohorts of appropriate age to receive the project benefits while a_0 represents the age cohorts who are too old to have received the project benefits.

The first difference or estimator (1) subtracts the change in outcomes across age cohorts (i.e. time) for the control area, from the change in outcomes across age cohorts for the treatment area. This first difference in theory eliminates dissimilarities across age cohorts, such as the generational effect of younger cohorts tending to have higher levels of education, regardless of location and exposure to the intervention.

The second difference or estimator (2) subtracts the difference in outcomes between the treatment and control area before the project was implemented, from the difference in outcomes between the two areas after the project was implemented. This second difference in theory eliminates geographic variations that remain constant across age cohorts, for instance if education on the whole is more widespread in Bunumbu regardless of age. This would address the fact that Bunumbu may have longstanding cultural differences in their "taste" for education stemming from the early introduction of Western schooling through the missionary church.

The double-differencing thus nets out both the cohort and location effects, thereby leaving the average treatment effect not of the project per se, but of *exposure* to the project. Formally, the DID estimating equation can be rewritten as the following regression equation:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1\ (bunumbuproject_i) + \beta_2\ (age25to34_i) + \beta_3\ (bunumbuproject_i * age25to34_i) + \beta_4 X'_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (3)$$

where Y represents different binary life outcomes (in the year 2004) for individual *i* including completing primary school, being literate, speaking English, being unemployed, and being an agricultural vs. service worker;[7] *bunumbuproject_i* is a dummy variable that equals 1 if the individual resided in 1990 in one of the 4 chiefdoms (Kpeje Bongre, Kpeje West, Njaluahun or

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[7] For simplicity, primary completion rates will be referred to as the life outcome of interest throughout this article.

Yawei) affected by the Bunumbu project (and would equal 0 if the individual in 1990 resided in one of the 6 neighboring chiefdoms not affected by the project); $age25to34_i$ is a dummy variable that equals 1 for those who are between 25 to 34 years-old (and would equal 0 if the individual is 35 years or older); and X'_i is a vector of time-invariant pre-treatment covariates including gender, ethnicity (Mende and Kissi, the two dominant ethnic groups in Kailahun), and religion. It was reasoned that those between 25 and 34 years of age (i.e. those who were born in 1970 and after) comprise the group who would have been of primary-school entering age[8] in 1975 the year after the pilot project began, and would thereby be the age cohorts who would have been eligible to attend the Bunumbu project primary schools. The vector of covariates were specifically selected because they represent pre-treatment characteristics that do not change over the duration of before and after the project, so as to avoid including post-treatment covariates that were measured after the project took place.

In this model, β_0 is the intercept that represents the average primary completion rate for individuals who are 35 or above and not from the Bunumbu project area. β_1 captures the average difference in primary completion rates between 25- to 34-year-olds and those above 35 years for *everyone* in both the treatment and control chiefdoms; in the absence of a time indicator that measures pre and post treatment, this age cohort variable serves as a similar substitute. β_2 measures the average difference in primary completion rates between *being from* and *not being from* the Bunumbu area, regardless of age. Lastly, β_3 is the estimated coefficient of interest that captures the average treatment effect of exposure to the project. Specifically, β_3 measures the difference in the *change* in mean primary completion rates between those under and over 35

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[8] This assumes that children begin primary school at the age of 5, as reported by UNESCO (1975).

years old residing in chiefdoms exposed to the Bunumbu project, relative to the same age cohorts

of individuals in chiefdoms not exposed to the project.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Results

To first check if the evolution in primary school completion is similar across the

treatment and control groups (see Angrist and Krueger, 1999), Figure 4 shows that long-run

trends in primary completion rates, as a proportion of the age cohort who completed primary

school in a chiefdom, were indeed similar between the Bunumbu project area and the control

area prior to the implementation of the project. Left of the first dotted vertical line are those

under 35 years old who would have been affected by the project, while those left of the second

dotted vertical line represents the age cohorts who would have been affected by the opening of

the Bunumbu Primary School by the Church Missionary Society in 1933. While primary

completion rates were generally higher and increased faster particularly in Kpeje West (i.e.

Bunumbu chiefdom), the trend plateaus and is relatively parallel to other chiefdoms for those

aged 35-59 years old who most represent the years leading up to the introduction of the

Bunumbu project.

Figure 4. Primary school completion rates across age cohorts
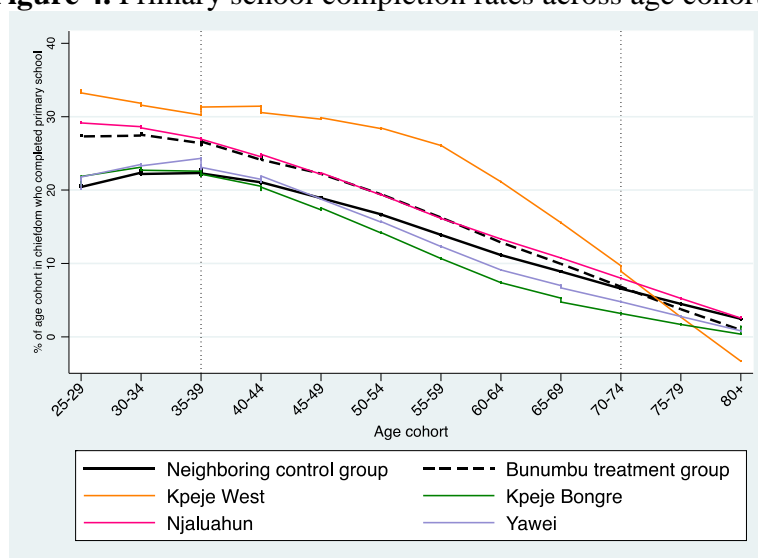
NOTE: Author's representation using 2004 Sierra Leone Census Data. Time is represented in reverse right-to-left chronology with younger age cohorts capturing more recent years. The first (left) dotted vertical line represents when the Bunumbu Project started in 1974, which in 2004 at the time the census data was taken corresponds to those below 35 years of age (assuming children start school at age 5). The second (right) dotted vertical line approximately represents when the first Bunumbu Primary school was established in 1933, which in 2004 corresponds to those who are below 75 years of age. The solid black line shows primary completion rates for the control group, while the dotted black line shows primary completion rates for the treatment group. The colored lines further show disaggregated primary completion rates for the four chiefdoms that were part of the Bunumbu treatment group.

Table 2 reports results from the DID model; the Bunumbu project effect is represented by the coefficient on the variable *Bunumbu project <u>and</u> below thirty five*. Without controlling for any covariates, results in the first column show a positive effect of exposure to the Bunumbu project on primary school completion rates.[9] Specifically, the difference in average primary completion rates between those from and not from the pilot project area is 3.8% points greater for those under 35 than it is for those over 35 years of age. In other words, the relative gain in primary completion rates between those under and over 35 is 3.8% points higher in the Bunumbu treatment area than the neighboring comparison area. This effect is statistically significant

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[9] Results are based on a complete case analysis. For the estimation of primary school completion rates, this amounted to a loss of 105 observations (out of n=8,423). Because of the low missing data rate, multiple imputation or other procedures to handle missing data were not performed.

at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level. Inclusion of covariates for gender, ethnicity and religion (column 2) does not change the size or significance of the coefficient. Moreover, a graphical depiction of primary completion rate estimates calculated using the second DID model specification shows the difference in primary completion rates between those over and under 35 to be greater in the Bunumbu project area than the neighboring chiefdoms not exposed to the project (see Figure 5).

Table 2. Effect of exposure to Bunumbu project on various life outcomes using DID estimation

	Primary	Primary	JSS	Secondary	Literacy	English	Ag. worker	Svc. Worker	Unemployment
Bunumbu project and below thirty-five	0.038	0.038	0.017	-0.002	0.018	0.001	-0.007	0.004	0.005
	(0.019)*	(0.018)*	(0.014)	(0.007)	(0.019)	(0.007)	(0.022)	(0.012)	(0.005)
Bunumbu project	0.0234	-0.0021	0.0074	0.0088	0.0239	-0.005	-0.141	0.025	-0.009
	(0.011)*	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.011)*	(0.005)	(0.014)**	(0.007)**	(0.003)**
Below thirty-five	0.043	0.048	0.006	-0.011	0.074	-0.006	-0.058	0.016	0.006
	(0.012)**	(0.011)**	(0.008)	(0.004)**	(0.012)**	(0.004)	(0.014)**	(0.007)*	(0.004)
Male		0.197	0.112	0.035	0.229	0.031	0.081	-0.015	0.013
		(0.009)**	(0.007)**	(0.004)**	(0.009)**	(0.004)**	(0.011)**	(0.005)**	(0.003)**
Mende		-0.027	-0.024	0.018	-0.034	-0.009	0.187	-0.083	-0.009
		(0.016)	(0.013)	(0.005)**	(0.017)*	(0.007)	(0.018)**	(0.013)**	(0.006)
Kissi		-0.103	-0.104	-0.013	-0.110	-0.022	0.173	-0.064	-0.009
		(0.033)**	(0.023)**	(0.012)	(0.033)**	(0.015)	(0.037)**	(0.023)**	(0.011)
Christian		0.235	0.148	0.068	0.200	0.050	-0.078	0.014	0.007
		(0.013)**	(0.011)**	(0.007)**	(0.013)**	(0.006)**	(0.014)**	(0.008)	(0.004)
Other religion		0.057	0.024	0.011	0.005	0.007	-0.087	0.028	-0.003
		(0.041)	(0.030)	(0.016)	(0.042)	(0.016)	(0.052)	(0.031)	(0.011)
Intercept	0.174	0.071	0.031	-0.018	0.100	0.013	0.361	0.130	0.016
	(0.007)**	(0.017)**	(0.013)*	(0.006)**	(0.018)**	(0.007)	(0.020)**	(0.014)**	(0.006)**
R^2	0.01	0.13	0.08	0.05	0.12	0.03	0.05	0.01	0.01
N	8,318	8,318	8,318	8,318	8,423	8,423	8,423	8,423	8,423

Note: * $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Estimated impact of exposure to the Bunumbu project is the coefficient of "Bunumbu project and below thirty five."

Figure 5. DID estimates of primary school completion rates
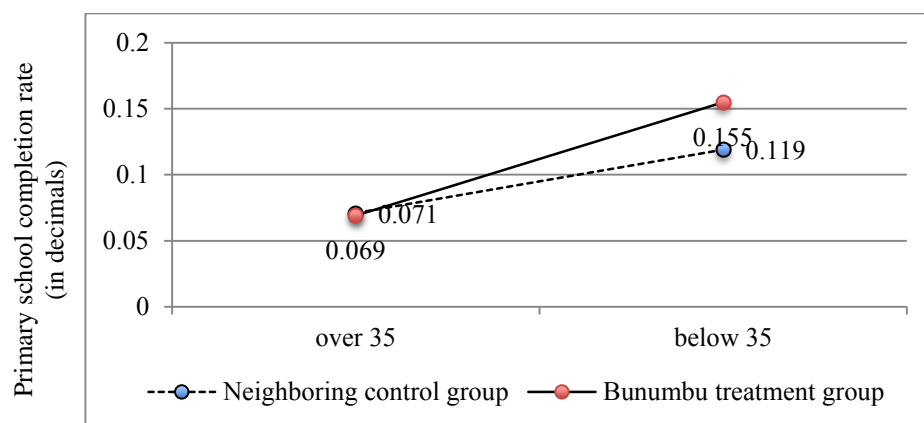
Source: Author's representation using results from specification 2 in Table 2
which includes covariates for gender, ethnicity, and religion.

Interestingly, exposure to the Bunumbu project did not have a statistically significant impact on the other life outcomes of junior secondary school completion, secondary school completion, literacy, speaking English, agricultural or service work, and unemployment. Although younger individuals under thirty-five years old in general, as well as residents of the Bunumbu project area in general, were statistically significantly more likely to be literate, the *change* in mean literacy rates between those under and over 35 years old residing in chiefdoms exposed and not exposed to the Bunumbu project was not significantly different.

4.2 Limitations

Despite the results suggesting a positive effect of the Bunumbu project on primary completion rates, this finding does not come without limitations. Namely, estimates from this study may be biased because of variables that were omitted due to the lack of available individual level data in the Census dataset. Ideally, this study would have also included covariates for the socioeconomic status or entrepreneurism/motivation of individuals – which are correlated to both participation in the Bunumbu project as well as the outcome of primary school completion. Assuming the project impact estimate is positive, the omission of these variables would have led to an overestimate of the effect of the project.

Another limitation of this study lies in its coarse definition of the treatment – one that conflates people who are only exposed to the project with those who actually participated in it. Put differently, the study treats everyone in the four pilot areas as being affected by the program, when in fact this is probably not true. Results therefore only measure *exposure* to the program, which presumably is a diluted estimate of the true effect of the project. Assuming that people residing in the Bunumbu area who did not participate in the project had a lower primary completion rate than those who did, results from this study would actually be underestimated. It is thus plausible that these two effects, the omitted variable bias and the coarse treatment definition, may cancel each other out.

Other limitations to the study stem from the application of a DID approach to estimating program impact. This strategy assumes that the difference in primary completion rates between those under and over 35 years old in the six control chiefdoms represents the change that would have been observed in the Bunumbu project area, had these pilot areas not received the project. Although the model controls for any unobservable cohort-invariant characteristics that differentially affect primary completion rates in the treatment versus control areas, it is not able to control for any geographic differences that do change across age cohorts and relate to the life outcome in question. Thus, even though major cultural differences across chiefdoms – such as ethnic or religious makeup that may contribute to differences in primary completion rates – would be controlled for, the model still assumes that these geographic differences are fixed over age cohorts. Accordingly, if for example a local Paramount chief suddenly instituted a community-level change that differentially affected younger age cohorts, this would not be accounted for.

Similarly, the DID model controls for widespread exogenous "shocks" that would have differentially affected education attainment for those under versus over 35 years old, but these events must have been common to all areas. For instance, a change in national policies would be controlled for, whereas a "shock" that only affects either the control or treatment chiefdoms (but not the other) would not. In other words, the model assumes that age cohort differences are fixed across geographic areas. This assumption of parallel trends is a strong one since it is possible that there may easily have been community level changes dictated by a local Paramount chief that would have differentially affected only either the Bunumbu project area or the control chiefdoms.

However, Acemoglu et al.'s (2013) study on chiefs in Sierra Leone attests to the resiliency to change that ruling families in local chiefdoms have, especially since the beginning of the 20th century. The lack of variation and turnover in local leadership, in conjunction with the fact that this study is of ten rural chiefdoms that are predominantly comprised of slow-changing traditional subsistence farming communities, lends strength to the belief that there is an overall sense of consistency in the passage of time, at least during the project period in question. The close proximity of these bordering chiefdoms, which at its farthest spans about 125 miles, also mitigates concerns of any differential geographic changes such as natural disasters or disease. Furthermore, both education and the economy in Sierra Leone were centralized in the hands of the state in 1972 after the dissolution of local councils (Zhou, 2009). This implies that any major educational or economic change would have been instituted as a national policy, which would in turn affect all areas.

A final concern is the fact that the four treatment group chiefdoms would have been on a different path towards educational attainment. Although Bunumbu may be considered an outlier

of sorts due to its early adoption of Western schooling and ideas, a hypothesis test of individuals

35 and above (who theoretically represent the trajectory before the Bunumbu project was

introduced) shows that there is no statistically significant difference in average primary

completion rates between the three treatment group chiefdoms (excluding Bunumbu) and the

other chiefdoms that form the control group (see Table 3).[10]

Table 3. Summary statistics comparing individuals 35 years old and over in control vs. treatment
chiefdoms excluding Bunumbu

	Control group	Treatment group (without Bunumbu)	Difference of means	SE
Primary completion	0.174	0.181	-0.007	0.012
Literate	0.207	0.234	-0.027*	0.012
Speaks English	0.027	0.026	-0.001	0.005
Unemployed	0.015	0.007	0.008*	0.003
Service worker	0.052	0.075	-0.022**	0.007
Agriculture worker	0.554	0.389	0.165**	0.015
N	3,055	1,743		

N=3,055 for the control chiefdoms except for primary completion where n=3,010. N=1,743 for the treatment
chiefdoms except for primary completion where n=1,722.

Moreover, rerunning the DID model with only these three treatment group chiefdoms

(i.e., Kpeje Bongre, Njaluahun, and Yawei) which are more similar to the control chiefdoms

shows an even stronger and statistically significant positive effect of exposure to the project on

primary school completion rates (see Table 4). The relative gain in primary completion rates

between those under and over 35 is now 4.3% points higher in these three chiefdoms than the

neighboring comparison chiefdoms. There is thus little reason to believe that the three chiefdoms

would have been on a different developmental path than the control group.

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[10] This is in contrast to the original summary statistics that included Bunumbu and all age cohorts, which showed
that treatment chiefdoms have a statistically significant 3% higher rate of completing primary school. Summary
statistics including Bunumbu and only individuals over 35 years old shows a 2.34% point difference in average
primary completion rates between control and treatment groups for (t=-2.12).

Table 4. DID estimates of exposure to Bunumbu project for only Yawei, Njaluahun and Kpeje Bongre treatment chiefdoms (excluding Bunumbu) on primary school completion

	Primary completion	Primary completion
Treatment group (excl. Bunumbu) <u>and</u> below thirty-five	0.043	0.043
	(0.020)*	(0.019)*
Treatment chiefdoms	0.007	-0.018
	(0.012)	(0.011)
Below thirty-five	0.043	0.048
	(0.012)**	(0.011)**
Male		0.196
		(0.009)**
Mende		-0.024
		(0.017)
Kissi		-0.101
		(0.033)**
Christian		0.229
		(0.013)**
Other religion		0.066
		(0.043)
Intercept	0.174	0.070
	(0.007)**	(0.017)**
R^2	0.01	0.12
N	7,686	7,686

* $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$ Robust standard errors in parentheses.

5. Discussion

In contrast to studies of contemporary educational programs, this study sought to revisit a historical UNESCO project to empirically evaluate how a large-scale rural educational development project might have impacted life outcomes, including primary school completion, in the long-term. Results show a statistically significant, positive impact of the Bunumbu project on primary school completion, corroborating past qualitative evaluations of the program. Moreover, there is evidence that Bunumbu project and non-Bunumbu project chiefdoms were on similar trajectories prior to the implementation of the project.

While the Bunumbu project's estimate of a 3.8%-point higher increase in primary completion rates might seem trivial compared to the results from evaluations of contemporary programs, this finding must be put in context. Broad institution of universal primary education

policies in Ethiopia, Malawi, and Uganda have been found to be effective in increasing years of completed schooling by 0.6 to 1.5 years (Moussa and Omoeva, 2020). Eliminating school fees in Uganda was also found to: 1) increase the probability of children entering primary school before age nine by 3% (Grogan, 2009), and 2) increase the completion rate of 4th grade boys and girls by 4.4% points and 11% points respectively (Nishimura et al., 2008).

These, however, were wide sweeping national policies as opposed to a programmatic intervention like the Bunumbu project. To name a few influential interventions from the last two decades that impacted school participation as opposed to education achievement as measured by test scores, the popular PROGRESA conditional cash transfer program in Mexico increased enrollment by a similar 3.4% - 3.6% points (Schultz 2004). Miguel and Kremer's (2004) study on deworming in Kenya increased primary school attendance by at least 7% points, while the BRIGHT school construction project in Burkina Faso increased enrollment by 19% points (Kazianga et al., 2013). Even a simple information campaign about earning differences by education levels for students in Madagascar – a brief and far less costly intervention than the Bunumbu project – increased average attendance by 3.5% points (Nguyen, 2013).

Comparatively, the Bunumbu project might seem like a less attractive intervention investment, especially considering the enormous physical and human inputs that were poured in to make the project a success. However, the Bunumbu project's impact was a 3.8%-point increase in the measure of primary school *completion*, not just attendance or enrollment (Langsten, 2014). Few studies test an intervention against the outcome of school completion, which extends beyond initial enrollment or provisional attendance. One study of an intervention that comes close to measuring school completion found that providing students with information on later earnings increased school completion by 0.18 years over the next four years (Jensen,

2010). However, this study was targeted at increasing school completion rates for students who were already in school – not in engaging students who were not at all in the school system as the Bunumbu project did.

All told, findings from this evaluation of the Bunumbu project – along with its main tenets of school construction, engaging local community members, and adapting the content of education to be responsive to and sustain local culture – suggest that the project was successful in its ability to influence the outcome of not just enrollment or attendance but the SDG goal of primary school completion. In fact, studies have increasingly identified pedagogical changes, curricular reforms, and the use of mother tongue in instruction and materials to have potential positive impacts (Conn, 2017; Snilstveit et al., 2017; Stutchbury and Biard, 2023) – often even more than programs that focus on education technology, teacher incentives, school supplies, or individual inputs like uniforms and textbooks (Evans and Acosta, 2021).

It is important to note, however, that this study is not able to discern which specific elements of the comprehensive Bunumbu project led to its effectiveness. Was it the way teachers were trained and integrated into the surrounding school community, or that the schools also served as Community Education Centers, or that the academic-oriented curriculum was changed to be more culturally responsive and sustaining for the local community of Bunumbu while still being aligned to national standards? Alternatively, scholars have underscored the importance of implementation in the process of educational change (Schweisfurth, 2011; Stutchbury and Biard, 2023). To this end, perhaps the Bunumbu project's success may have originated less from the direct project objectives, but more from the project's implementation strategy to involve local community and family members in their child's education. Although it is not possible to disentangle which specific project components of the comprehensive Bunumbu project most

impacted primary completion rates, results do suggest promise for the key CRSE principles by which the Bunumbu project was designed and implemented. In fact, the Bunumbu project often went deeper than CRSE's main principles of nurturing students' academic success and cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

For example, recent studies have shown a major challenge of enacting CRSE across various cultural contexts is teachers' insufficient knowledge of their minoritized students' backgrounds (Alisaari et al., 2023; Kotluk and Aydin, 2021; Loyd et al., 2023). To this end, a unique project feature of the Bunumbu project – one that extends beyond the basic tenets of CRSE – was to embed teachers into the local community. While some teachers were recruited from the school communities, nationally (and internationally) recruited teachers were not only trained at the local teachers' college and school sites, but they also formed relationships with residents, such as in making visits to family farms. Moreover, beyond just the teachers, schools themselves were integrated into the community through transforming school sites into community education centers that also offered non-formal educational programs created and taught by local residents. In both research and practice, the focus of CRSE is typically on the teacher but in this way, the Bunumbu project shows how the unit of analysis (and program design and implementation) could be extended to the school level as well in thinking about how a school site can also play a role in sustaining local culture.

Scholars have also found instances when teachers' reliance on localized cultural knowledge could come at the expense of maintaining content rigor. For instance, Hoadley's (2024) study focused attention on the "what" and "how" of using structured pedagogy programs in Africa, surfacing teachers' weak grasp of the "what" of instruction whereby teachers avoided challenging content in the lesson plans and instead relied on using "local themes" and "hyper

local, context-dependent understandings and meanings" (p. 5). She furthers argued that

"curricular justice for these students will never lie merely in harking back to their community's

knowledge bases; this will only serve to further marginalize them in modern-day economies and

societies" (ibid). To this end, the Bunumbu project serves as an instructive contrast to such

programs in which the intended curriculum is "derived largely from high income, monolingual

contexts" (Hoadley, 2024, p. 7). Rather than demanding fidelity in implementing an externally

designed program, the central feature of the Bunumbu project – one that is in line with classic

CRSE principles – was altering the content of education to be more locally relevant to students.

An interview with Braima, a Sierra Leonean who taught at one of the Bunumbu pilot schools in

the 1970s, confirms this. When asked about the impact the new curricula had on students,

Braima explained:

> When they made it into that, what we can swallow, it was much easier for these
>
> people. You were not going to teach, you know, what you teach in Cambridge to
>
> the children. Adapting it to what was already going on, the agricultural part, was
>
> what made the program work…You have most of the students coming from
>
> villages, and you're going to tell them about atoms…and this chemistry and all this
>
> stuff? No! No, I'm not going to read about snow. Hell no…But to read about our
>
> own elders who wrote poems that we can relate to…that worked.[11]

Thus, while coherence between curriculum standards, exams, and teacher instruction is indeed

important (Atuhurra and Kaffenberger, 2022), what the Bunumbu project also demonstrates are

the benefits of reflecting on the potential Eurocentric bias that may be systemically inherent in

exams and curricula (see Sriprakash et al., 2020), along with the importance of integrating local

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[11] Personal communication, April 23, 2013.

culture and indigenous knowledge systems into the curricula in ways that still prepare students to demonstrate learning proficiency on external exams and assessments.

6. Conclusion

With the SDG target deadline for having all children in the world complete primary school fast approaching, this article aimed to revisit the past to evaluate the effect of the historical, culturally responsive Bunumbu project on primary completion rates in a rural, sub-Saharan context. By applying a DID estimation strategy to cross-sectional census data using age cohorts instead of time, this analysis presents a methodological contribution that can potentially assist future researchers in conducting rigorous causal studies evaluating past education projects.

Klees' recent essay raised alarm that "even the most basic goal – universal primary education (UPE) – has repeatedly been promised and never fulfilled" (2024, p. 1). Particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where, as of 2021, about one third of children do not complete primary school (Evans and Acosta, 2021; United Nations, 2023), I argue that more attention could be paid to the role of teachers and curricula. To this end, studies of the learner-centered pedagogies and structured pedagogy programs that have become dominant in sub-Saharan Africa have demonstrated more challenges than promise (Hoadley, 2024; Schweisfurth, 2011; Tabulawa, 2013). Findings from this analysis, however, support the potential of blending culturally responsive and sustaining education with other approaches like structured pedagogy programs. Future research can test and explore the distinct effects within and across these approaches.

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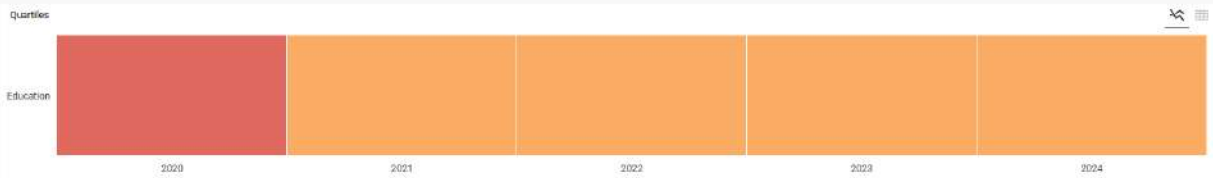
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[IJERE] Article Review Request
1 message

Septian Dwi Cahyo <septian@iaescore.com>   Wed, Apr 19, 2023 at 8:48 AM
To: "Dr. Khoerul Umam" <khoerul.umam@uhamka.ac.id>

Dr. Khoerul Umam:

I believe that you would serve as an excellent reviewer of the manuscript, "Starting school during and following pandemic: Voices of first graders, Central Java-Indonesia," which has been submitted to International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE). The submission's abstract is inserted below, and I hope that you will consider undertaking this important task for us.

Please log into the journal web site by 2023-04-26 to indicate whether you will undertake the review or not, as well as to access the submission and to record your review and recommendation. The web site is https://ijere.iaescore.com/index.php/IJERE

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Thank you for considering this request.

Septian Dwi Cahyo
IAES
septian@iaescore.com

"Starting school during and following pandemic: Voices of first graders, Central Java-Indonesia"

Abstract
The involvement of children's aspirations is an essential part of educational research that encourages effective learning and well-being among children. Thus, this study aims to promote children's aspirations of starting schools during and following the school-from-home period amid the pandemic situation. It implemented a face-to-face interview involving 63 first graders of primary school level aged seven years, consisting of 24 boys and 39 girls, by adhering to the prevailing health protocols. The thematic analysis generated two significant findings, including children's perspectives and their preferences related to school from home. With regards to children's perspectives, this research suggests that children prefer to learn with their teachers and friends at school. Based on the findings, further research is required to explore the responses of children, parents, and teachers to obtain comprehensive data.

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Khoerul Umam <khoerul.umam@uhamka.ac.id>

[IJERE] Automated Submission Review Reminder
1 message

Dr. Lina Handayani <ijere@iaesjournal.com>   Tue, Apr 25, 2023 at 4:04 AM
To: "Dr. Khoerul Umam" <khoerul.umam@uhamka.ac.id>

The following message is being delivered on behalf of International Journal
of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE).

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Dr. Khoerul Umam:

Just a gentle reminder of our request for your review of the submission,
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Submission To Be Reviewed

Title	Voices of first graders: exploratory study on starting school during post-pandemic period
Journal Section	General Education Concepts

Abstract   The involvement of children's aspirations is an essential part of educational research that encourages effective learning and well-being among children. Thus, this study aims to promote children's aspirations of starting schools during the post-pandemic situation. It implemented a face-to-face and online interview involving 63 first graders of primary school level aged seven years, consisting of 24 male and 39 female, by adhering to the prevailing health protocols. The thematic analysis generated two significant findings, including children's perspectives and their preferences for either face-to-face learning or online learning. With regards to children's perspectives, this research suggests that children prefer to learn with their teachers and friends at school. Based on the findings, further research is required to explore the responses of children, parents, and teachers to obtain comprehensive data

Submission Editor	Segini Keengwe ✉ (Review)
	Elina Maslo ✉ (Review)
	Jonathan deHaan, Ph.D. ✉ (Review)
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Submission Metadata	VIEW METADATA

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Your Response	2023-04-27
Review Submitted	2023-04-27
Review Due	2023-05-17

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    Response   Accepted

2. Click on file names to download and review (on screen or by printing) the files associated with this submission.
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    Supplementary File(s)   None

3. Click on icon to fill in the review form.
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Starting school during and following pandemic: Voices of first graders, Central Java-Indonesia

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

The involvement of children's aspirations is an essential part of educational research that encourages effective learning and well-being among children. Thus, this study aims to promote children's aspirations of starting schools during and following the school-from-home period amid the pandemic situation. It implemented a face-to-face interview involving 63 first graders of primary school level aged seven years, consisting of 24 boys and 39 girls, by adhering to the prevailing health protocols. The thematic analysis generated two significant findings, including children's perspectives and their preferences related to school from home. With regards to children's perspectives, this research suggests that children prefer to learn with their teachers and friends at school. Based on the findings, further research is required to explore the responses of children, parents, and teachers to obtain comprehensive data.

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1. INTRODUCTION (10 PT)

The number of international literatures highlighting the urgency of children's experiences in the first grade, as a basis for success in the later years of primary school has marked a significant growth in recent years[1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]. The phenomenon implies that the first grade is a substantial period for the next grades. Starting school is also an important experience for children and their families. However, various research findings also proved the first day of school as potential event that might cause stress to children and parents[9].

The transition from preschool to first grade is believed as the key process to children's growth. Children who have access to preschool education have a higher opportunity to success, especially in passing the first grade period[7] [10] [11]. During the first grade, children's learning outcomes are highly correlated with their preschool experiences and the types of schools they have attended [12]. The study about the transition process is considered essential for understanding children's experiences and well-being. Although the highlight related to transition to school and school readiness is no longer a new phenomenon, various studies reveal that many children are not prepared to receive adequate supports for a positive school transition period[13] [14].

Commented [KU1]: 1. Strengthen the Opening Sentence and Purpose
The first sentence is passive and generic. It uses a common academic phrase ("is an essential part of... research") that doesn't immediately tell the reader what your study is about. An effective abstract starts with a clear problem statement or a direct, active statement of purpose.
•**Current:** "The involvement of children's aspirations is an essential part of educational research that encourages effective learning and well-being among children."
•**Suggestion:** Start directly with the study's aim and context. For example: "This study explores the aspirations and school transition experiences of first-grade students during and following the school-from-home period in Central Java, Indonesia." This is more direct and professional.
2. Enhance the Methodology with Key Details
The methodology section is too brief. While it mentions interviews and the sample size, it omits critical information that is standard for an abstract. Including these details adds credibility and helps the reader understand the study's scope.
•**Current:** "It implemented a face-to-face interview involving 63 first graders of primary school level aged seven years, consisting of 24 boys and 39 girls, by adhering to the prevailing health protocols."
•**Suggestion:** Specify the type of interview (e.g., semi-structured) and the study's geographic location and time frame. A better version would be: "A qualitative, semi-structured face-to-face interview was conducted with 63 first graders (aged seven; 24 boys, 39 girls) in Central Java, Indonesia. Interviews were held during the 2021 school-from-home policy, with strict adherence to health protocols."
3. Improve the Specificity of Findings
Your abstract claims "thematic analysis generated two significant findings," but then presents vague categories ("perspectives" and "preferences"). The single specific finding mentioned—that children prefer to learn with teachers and friends—is too broad for a conclusion. An abstract needs to summarize the *most impactful and specific* results.
•**Current:** "Thematic analysis generated two significant findings, including children's perspectives and their preferences related to school from home. With regards to children's perspectives, this research suggests that children prefer to learn with their teachers and friends at school."
... [1]

Commented [KU2]: 1.Wordiness: The phrase "has marked a significant growth in recent years" can be simplified. A more direct statement like "Recent international literature highlights..." would be more effective.

2.Clarity: The links between the sentences could be smoother. You introduce the importance of the first grade and then jump to the stress it can cause. A connecting phrase like "This critical period, however, is not without its challenges..." would improve the flow.

Commented [KU3]: Passive Voice: The phrase "The transition...is believed as the key process" can be changed to a more active voice, for example, "The transition from preschool to first grade is a critical process..."
Repetitive Claims: The paragraph makes a similar point several times: that preschool experience is highly correlated with first-grade success. You can combine these ideas for better efficiency. For example, instead of separate sentences about preschool access and learning outcomes, you could write: "Children with preschool education demonstrate higher learning outcomes, with their experiences and school type strongly correlating with their first-grade success."
Missing Connection: You state that "many children are not prepared to receive adequate supports." This is an excellent point, but you should explain *why* this is the case or what factors contribute to this lack of preparation. This would make your introduction stronger.

During 2021, Indonesian government dealt with the second wave of COVID-19 by reintroducing the school-from-home policy through the implementation of distance learning patterns and strategies (Circular Letter No. 4 of 2020). The condition had led to a shift in children's learning and playing settings since they started to stay at home for 24 hours, including those who had just started school for few months. This kind of emergency learning program requires evaluation, especially for children who are embarking the early schooling phase. Therefore, further analysis is required to understand children's experiences when starting primary school, considering the importance of school transition and children development in general.

This research was organized in Central Java province, Indonesia. Cultural factors that influenced service provision and other aspects of the transition experiences are later included. Regarding a number of linguistic and anthropological studies, cultural discontinuity of children's experiences between home and school in diverse cultural contexts may contribute a particular impact to the period of starting school[15] [16] [17].

This research enriches theoretical and empirical studies on the concept of school transition experienced by children in Central Java, Indonesia during the pandemic. Previous studies, including Pangestuti, et al. [18] and Nurhayati [19] only discusses the transition process during the prepandemic period. This research also serves as an evaluation material for the government, schools, teachers, and parents in responding to the upcoming transition period, especially during the time of uncertainty amid the COVID-19 alert.

School-from-home policy in Central Java, Indonesia

During the pandemic, primary schools in Central Java implemented asynchronous learning using WhatsApp application (https://radarsemarang.jawapos.com), in which the learning activity only covered assignments distributed through the parents' WhatsApp group (https://edukasi.kompas.com). Through a survey involving 384 respondents (bbpmpjateng@kemdikbud.go.id), The Central Java Education Quality Assurance Institute (LPPM) highlighted WhatsApp as the most popular application (93.2%) among the respondents. WhatsApp was the most favored application by teachers for conducting class activities, including distributing practice tests (93%). However, using this application, teachers rarely organized face-to-face sessions since they only relied on video-based explanation and messaging during learning periods.

The implementation of online learning model using WhatsApp is the first choice favored by teachers (100%)[20]. The use of WhatsApp Group as a learning media for primary school students is common [21] [22] [23]. In this scenario, teahers provide materials and assignments, while students have to download and learn the learning content through the application. In addition to WhatsApp, teachers normally use Zoom once in a week, considering that the majority of parents are working, while not all students have personal devices.

During the online learning, it is common for parents dominate the activities instead of their children [20]. Students demonstrate less participation in the learning process due to one-way interaction that posits the students to focus on the screen when doing their tasks or exams online [21]. With the distribution of video-based learning material, teachers rarely provide detailed explanations of the lesson[24].

Starting school: from students' perspectives

"Starting school" is a concept associated with the discussions of "preparation" in terms of physical, social, and cognitive skills that children must possess to meet school requirements[25] [26]. Children's readiness is one of the components of school readiness that focuses on the children's development and abilities. A number of studies have examined the relationship between certain types of preschool experiences and children's subsequent success rates after getting admitted to school[27] [28] [29] [30] [31] [32] [33].

Numerous research focusing on the quality of child care and the impacts of Head Start and other similar programs are included in this category[34] [35] [36] [37] [38] [39] [40]. Many literatures deal with the home-school correlation, yet the main highlights only discuss after-school attendance period [41] [42] [43] [44] [39].

It is believed that children start to witness various positive things at school since the first grade, despite limited research that have proven the transition process. School is perceived as a place that makes them happy, where they can meet their friends and teachers to learn and play with. School is also a place to study and work (do schoolwork). Children's first impression emphasizes these characteristics and signifies a positive attitude towards school. However, several factors can also trigger children's disliking about school, for instance, bullying, quarrel, and punishments from teachers.

In addition to grow happiness among children, school has a role in its realization. Noddings [45] mentioned "the best home and school" are happy places. A happy school environment is essential to promote effective learning and boost students' talents [46]. Bird and Markle [47] revealed the advantage of a happy school environment to boost students' academic success and enhance their life skills. In contrast, the declining quality of school happiness may lead to the lower academic success, loneliness, stress, depression, and drug

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Commented [KU4]: Clarity: The sentence "Cultural factors...are later included" is a bit awkward. You can rephrase it to "We also consider the influence of cultural factors on the transition experiences..."
Integration of Sources: You cite a few linguistic and anthropological studies. This is great, but you should briefly explain *how* these studies are relevant to your own. What specific insights do they provide about cultural discontinuity in the context of school transitions?

Commented [KU5]: Specificity: The statement "This research enriches theoretical and empirical studies..." is good. You can make it even better by briefly mentioning what specific aspect of the theoretical and empirical studies it enriches.
Clear Contribution: You successfully differentiate your study from previous ones by highlighting its focus on the pandemic period. This is a very effective way to establish your paper's unique contribution.
Audience: You mention that this research serves as an "evaluation material for the government, schools, teachers, and parents." This is an important detail that highlights the real-world value of your work.

Commented [KU6]: The phrasing "School-from-home policy in Central Java, Indonesia" is a little informal; consider rephrasing it to something more academic like **"The Implementation of School-from-Home Policy in Central Java, Indonesia."** Additionally, the links to news articles are unusual for a formal paper and should be replaced with proper academic citations. You state that learning "only covered assignments," which seems like a strong claim. You need to be careful to present this as a finding from your sources, not as a blanket statement.

Commented [KU7]: The phrase **"it is common for parents dominate the activities instead of their children"** is a crucial point that needs to be supported with more specific data from the cited sources. "Students demonstrate less participation" is a good point, but it's important to explain why. You mention "one-way interaction," but you should clarify what that means in this specific context. Also, the claim that teachers "rarely provide detailed explanations" should be phrased carefully to reflect the findings of the study you're citing, not as a general truth.

addiction [48]. The lack of happiness significantly influences children's personalities, intelligence, thinking skills, creativity, and educational achievement [49].

Research on children's attitudes towards school (happy/unhappy emotions and positive/negative impressions) should analyze these challenges. The lack of happiness at school may cause a major problem in education systems [50] [51]. Attention to students' emotions and impressions should be emphasized since the early childhood and no later than adolescence, considering the children's cognitive and emotional aspects.

This study highlights different learning conditions experienced by Indonesian children, especially during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a number of studies revealed that students experienced boredom during the situation [21]. This research will contribute to providing necessary inputs for the government, education institutions, and parents to ensure fine process of starting school among children. The quality of a school institution should be determined not only based on the accreditation status but also the rate of students' positive impressions and experiences.

2. METHOD

Research objectives and research questions

The study is directed to illustrate the first-graders' experiences in starting school during and following the school-from-home policy. It aims to explore: (1) children's attitudes; and (2) children's experiences in starting school during and following the lockdown. The following research questions are addressed:

- How do children describe their attitudes when starting school at home and school (feelings, impressions, preferences for learning settings and partners) most of the time?
- How do children describe their experiences in starting school during the first grade (liking and disliking) at home during the lockdown?
- How do children describe their experiences in starting school during the first grade (liking and disliking) at school/classroom following the lockdown?

Research method

Clark, et al. [52] emphasized several methods to record children's aspirations, such as interviews, questionnaires, group work, and participatory games. This current research is designed as a basic qualitative research and employs interview for the data collection. A number of previous studies also used an interview approach to describe children's experiences in starting school individually [53] [54] [55] [56] [57].

Participants

A total of 63 primary school children including 24 boys and 39 girls (grade 1, age 7) who were studying from home during the COVID-19 pandemic were involved in this study. Participants lived in suburban and rural areas in Central Java, Indonesia. The distribution of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants

Male		Female	
n	%	n	%
24	38.095	39	61.90

Data collection

This study took two forms of consent of participation from parents and children. The first consent was related to the children's availability to allow the researchers to inquire about their first grade experiences through homeschooling. The second agreement was related to the students' behavior towards school-from-home activities that was followed up through the interview sessions and relevant activities.

The interview sessions were conducted online and on-site to capture the children's experiences in starting primary school during the pandemic. The questions consisted of: (1) How do you think and feel about school from home? Can you tell me something fun/hard about school?" (2) Who would you prefer to study with? Do you like studying at home or at school/classroom? (3) During learning from home, what activities do you like and dislike the most? (4) Following the pandemic, what activities do you have at school? Which activity do you like and dislike the most?

Interview setting

The data were collected by visiting participants' homes. Researchers were allowed to collect the data according to the parents' consents. Researchers also contacted children via video call platforms.

Timeline, recording, field notes
The research was completed within six months. During the process, the researchers were assisted by trained research assistants to lead the interviews session with two or three children daily based on their availability and their parents' consents. The meetings were set twice, in which the first meeting aimed at gathering the big picture of the children's daily lives and make them familiar with the presence of the researchers, while the second meeting aimed to collect all necessary data through offline and online interviews. The interview session required around 20 to 30 minutes for every child.

This study only managed to cover one interview session due to the strict health protocols during the pandemic. Follow-up sessions should be considered for future research to ensure the reliability of the responses. The researchers also used field notes to record the details.

Confidentiality
Parental consents, children's identities, field notes, and interview transcripts were stored safely and only accessible to the researchers. After completing the data collection, the researchers copied the recordings and recorded the interview/conversation points regarding the drawings made by children. To ensure the security of the respondents' data, this research utilized coding for the analysis.

Researchers as instruments
Researchers carefully assessed the information from the children and avoided rush conclusion. Researchers actively engaged with the children to gather their opinions. When the conversation ended, the researchers continued to observe, review, and stimulate further discussions with the children.

Data analysis
It should be noted that the decision of uninvolvement is a freedom of expression [58]. Children's responses from the interview were identified using thematic analysis by examining patterns or themes based on the organization of the data description [59]. This technique is more complex compared to content analysis that only explores the implicit or explicit meanings of textual materials.

Trustworthiness
To demonstrate trustworthiness (transferability, dependability, credibility), the thematic analysis adopted Guba's [60] theory. In accordance to Silverman's [61], the researchers read the entire data set to generate the overall picture of the content through observations, questions, and ideas to increase the credibility of the recursive analysis. An additional measure of credibility was implemented with coding to capture all relevant and representative codes from the whole data.

Research team members met at two critical points during the coding process. The coders consisted of a Master's student and an Associate Professor from different university departments expertised in educational theory and child development.

This study did not involve direct interaction between participants and coders. During the reflexive approach, coders constantly communicated during the coding process to ensure the coherence of the data. The final procedure of ensuring trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability used the theme descriptions by inviting the readers to examine the data and clarify the relationships between the selected categories in the data set as a whole [61] [62].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Based on the thematic analysis, this study provide some theme as follows: attitudes (impression, learning settings, and learning partners preference), activities at school during and following the pandemic.

3.1. Attitudes
3.1.1. Impressions

Table 2. Children's Attitudes

Attitudes		
	Positive	Happy
	Negative	Boring, annoying
		Displeased
		Sad
	No response	No answer, no response, passive

Some students demonstrated positive and negative attitudes (impressions and emotions). A positive attitude was reflected by the responses of happiness towards the school-from-home activities.

Mn, 7 yo, girl
R : Which one do you prefer, learning at school or at home?
At school with my friends and teacher

Sab, 7 yo, boy
R : Which one do you prefer, learning at school or at home?
At school. More friends

Ptri, 7 yo, girl
R : Which one do you prefer, learning at school or at home?
At home with my parents.

Aurl, 7 yo, girl
R : Which one do you prefer, learning at school or at home?
At home with my mom

3.1.2. Learning settings and learning partners

Based on the finding, 48 out of 63 students preferred studying at school due to the presence of friends, teachers, activities that could improve their skills, and food stalls. A total of 13 students preferred learning from home due to the presence of their family members (parents, siblings), freedom to play, the quiet atmosphere, safety from viruses, and good marks.

Table 4. Preferences for learning settings and learning partners

Learning settings	Home	The presence of family members (parents, sibling)
		Quiet atmosphere
		Freedom to play
		Safety from viruses
		Good marks
	School	The presence of teachers
		The presences of friends
		The presence of teachers and friends
		Many activities to improve skills
		Snacking time
		No reason

Prl, 7 yo, girl
R : Which one do you prefer, learning at school or at home?
At school with teacher. My teacher is kind and caring.

Zav, 7 yo, boy
R : Which one do you prefer, learning at school or at home?
At home with my parents. Teacher often scolds me at school because I don't understand the assignments. Mom never scolds me.

Mn, 7 yo, girl
R : Which one do you prefer, learning at school or at home?
At school with my friends and teacher.

Aum, 7 yo, girl
R : Which one do you prefer, learning at school or at home?
At school with teacher. There are a lot of friends too

3.2. School-from-home activities during the pandemic

Children's responses varied from positive to negative sentiments related to school-from-home activities during the pandemic. They preferred a number of activities, including playing with gadgets, watching television, playing mobile games, playing with friends, helping parents, getting involved in positive activities

(searching for eels, cycling, watering flowers), studying with family members (parents, siblings), learning new skills, learning online, and reciting the Koran.

In the other hand, there were several situations that they disliked, including the quiet and boring condition of the house, the unpleasant treatment from relatives (messing around with toys, mischief), the prohibition from playing outside due to the virus, household chores (sweeping, babysitting), lack of attention from parents, too much napping, and the time when they had nothing to do. A total of 18 children liked any kinds of activities at home.

Table 6. Preferences for home activities during the pandemic

Preferences for activities at home	Higher interest	Helping parents
		Learning with family members (parents, siblings)
		Positive activities (searching for eels, cycling, watering the flowers)
		Playing with friends
		Playing mobile games
		Playing with pets
		Online learning
		Learning new skills
		Reciting the Koran
		All activities
		No activity
	Lower interest	A lot of homework, private lessons
		Boring situation
		Lack of attention from parents
		Prohibition from playing outside due to virus
		Playing undesired activities
		Napping
		Household chores (sweeping, babysitting)
		Doing nothing all day
		No activity
		Unpleasing treatment from siblings

Alv, 7 yo, boy
R : During learning from home, what activities do you like the most?
I like playing with my smartphone.
R : What is the activity that you do not like?
It is boring because I cannot meet my friends and my teacher.

Njw, 7 yo, girl
R : During learning from home, what activities do you like the most?
I like playing.
R : What is the activity that you do not like?
I am bored because I cannot meet my friends.

Rcp, 7 yo, girl
R : During learning from home, what activities do you like the most?
I like watching TV.
R : What is the activity that you do not like?
I do not like babysitting my sibling

Rdt, 7 yo, boy
R : During learning from home, what activities do you like the most?
I like reciting the Koran at home, helping mom to sweep the floor, and playing with my sibling.
R : What is the activity that you do not like?
I do not like it when my sibling asks for money to buy snakcs.

Mn, 7 yo, girl
R : What activities do you have at school? Which activity do you like the most?

I like karawitan (Javanese music) extracurricular at school.
R : What is the activity that you do not like the most?
I do not like Friday exercise. It is tiring.

Alf, 7yo, boy
R : What activities do you have at school? Which activity do you like the most?
I like playing soccer at school.
What is the activity that you do not like the most?
I do not like school if there are many assignments.

Kai, 7 yo, girl
R : During learning from home, what activities do you like the most?
I can study with mama at home.
R : What is the activity that you do not like?
It is quiet at home.

Khaf , 7 yo, girl
R : During learning from home, what activities do you like the most?
I like playing with my sibling.
R : What is the activity that you do not like?
Home is boring. I do not like it when I fight over the phone with my sibling.

Ridw, 7 yo, boy
R : During learning from home, what activities do you like the most?*I like watching TV and playing games using my phone.*
R : What is the activity that you do not like?
It is boring at home without friends.

Kev, 7 yo, boy
R : During learning from home, what activities do you like the most?
I like playing better than studying at home. I like playing games using my dad's phone.
R : What is the activity that you do not like?
Mom is scary. She will scold me if I do not do my homework.

3.3. First-day activities at school following the pandemic

Children responded to the researchers by explaining their liking and disliking about school in the following pandemic period. The researchers considered that this question could reflect the children's experiences during the transition of the policy when they were still required to implement health protocols.

Based on the analysis of the interview, children generally preferred doing several activities at school, such as sports, free plays during recess, arts (drawing and dancing), thematic learning (language, math, science), snacking time, learning with fun teachers, studying with friends, having extra activities, and helping teachers. A total of nine students chose to not respond to this question.

In the other hand, they also experienced some unpleasing moments at school, such as the difficulty in making friends, uncomfortable treatment, lots of tasks and assignments that required long duration of learning, sanctions from the teachers, lack of fun in certain events, noise, napping, art learning, and absence of fun activities during free time. A total of six students chose to not respond to this question.

Table 5. School activities following to the pandemic

Preferences for activities at school	Higher interest	Free plays
		Art learning (drawing and dancing)
		Language, math, science learning
		Physical education
		Snacking time
		Learning with friends
		Extracurricular activities
		Helping teachers
		All activities
		No preference
		Fun learning with teachers
		Lots of tasks and assignments

Commented [KU8]: This paragraph sets up the research method but lacks some crucial detail. The statement that "researchers considered that this question could reflect the children's experiences" is weak. It sounds like an assumption rather than a deliberate research design choice. You need to explain the rationale behind your qualitative approach. What was the purpose of asking about likes and dislikes? How did this question help you gain a deeper understanding of their experiences?
A more effective way to phrase this would be to state that this open-ended question was used to **elicit qualitative data on the children's subjective experiences** during the transition period. It's not about what you "considered" but what you **aimed to capture** with the question. The current phrasing feels speculative rather than intentional.

Commented [KU9]: This paragraph lists the children's preferred activities, which is a good starting point. However, it reads more like a bulleted list in prose format. For a high-quality paper, you need to **synthesize these findings** into a coherent narrative. The list of activities is good, but what is the overarching theme? The activities they enjoy are all **social** and **interactive**, such as "free plays during recess" and "studying with friends." This is the core finding you should highlight. The fact that nine students didn't respond is an interesting data point, but it's presented without context. Why do you think they didn't respond? Did they not have a preference, or was there another reason?

Commented [KU10]: Similar to the previous paragraph, this section lists dislikes but doesn't interpret them. The "unpleasing moments" you describe, like "difficulty in making friends" and "lack of fun in certain events," all point to a common theme: **social and emotional challenges**. The list also includes **academic stressors** such as "lots of tasks and assignments." By grouping these themes, you can create a more impactful argument. Also, "uncomfortable treatment" is a very vague term that could refer to many things. You should clarify what this means with a brief example or more precise language.
The fact that "napping" and "art learning" are listed as dislikes is unusual and warrants some explanation. Why would a child dislike these activities? This is a great opportunity to show a deeper understanding of your research subjects.
For the students who didn't respond, the same question applies as in the previous paragraph: why do you think they didn't respond? This could be a significant finding in itself.
To improve, you could say, "Conversely, the children's negative experiences were linked to social difficulties and academic pressure. They reported challenges with peer relationships and a perceived lack of engaging, creative outlets. Academic-related dislikes centered on the volume and duration of tasks, suggesting that the children struggled with the demands of the online learning curriculum." This interpretation makes the data more powerful and directly relevant to your overall study.

Lower interest	Exhaustion due to long activities	
	Sanctions from the teachers	
	Difficulty in making friends that resulted in unequal treatment	
	No activity	
	Napping	
	Unpleasing exprience (losing belongings, feeling unconfident when doing presentation in front of the class)	
	Noise	
	Art class	

M. Alv, 7 yo, boy
R : What activities do you have at school? Which activity do you like the most?
I like sports.
R : What is the activity that you do not like the most?
I do not like studying.

Ryt, 7 yo, girl
R : What activities do you have at school? Which activity do you like the most?
I like dancing.
R : What is the activity that you do not like the most?
There is nothing that I do not like.

Arg, 7 yo, boy
R : What activities do you have at school? Which activity do you like the most?
Playing soccer.
R : What is the activity that you do not like the most?
I do not like quarrelling with friends

Njw, 7 yo, girl
R : What activities do you have at school? Which activity do you like the most?
I like drawing.
R : What is the activity that you do not like the most?
I do not like mischievous friends

Khr, 7 yo, boy
R : What activities do you have at school? Which activity do you like the most?
I like sports at school and I also like talking to my friends.
R : What is the activity that you do not like the most?
I do not like when I have a lot of homework..

Ary, 7 yo, boy
R : What activities do you have at school? Which activity do you like the most?
I like sports and drum band at school. I like gathering with my friends.
R : What is the activity that you do not like the most?
I do not like having a lot of homework. It makes me sleepy.

Syf, 7 yo, girl
R : What activities do you have at school? Which activity do you like the most?
I like drawing, writing, reading.
R : What is the activity that you do not like the most?
I do not like naughty friends.

Njw, 7 yo, girl
R : What activities do you have at school? Which activity do you like the most?
I like drawing.
R : What is the activity that you do not like the most?

I do not like mischievous friends.

Aml, 7 yo, girl)
R : What activities do you have at school? Which activity do you like the most?
I like playing with friends at school. We play marbles, hide and seek, and many more.
R : What is the activity that you do not like the most?
But sometimes I do not like school. I am still sleepy but I have to go to school early.

3.4. Discussion

A number of research explored children's perspectives on different aspects of their everyday lives [63], such as children's experiences in schools [64], children's perspectives on good school meals [65] (Bruselius-Jensen, 2014), children's perspectives on interior decoration of schools [66] (Clark, 2005), children's experiences about bullying [67] [68] [69] [70], children's experiences about outbreak in their community Denis-Ramirez, Sørensen, & Skovdal, 2017); chronically ill children's interpretations of their own symptoms [71] [72] [73], children's experiences about important situations at home, day-care institution, and school [74] [63], as well as how children's participation in learning communities and their hopes for the future [75].

Several research mentioned that children were able to communicate with adults to talk about their lives, experiences, and concerns for people close to them and their immediate environment[76] [77] [78] [79] [80]. Regarding the studies, the researchers directly spoke with the children and invited them to express their experiences about the respective topics.

The exploration of children's perspectives during school transition is a relatively new practice, marking only a few research that cover this area of discussion. The highlight on children's perspectives related to school transition provides valuable overviews on how first graders experience school transition, especially during the school-from-home learning amid the pandemic situation. Although it does not include certain strategies or activities that work best with them, the research reflects a considerable consistency in its broad findings, especially related to young children's capacities in sharing valid and valuable information, in addition to mentioning some issues that they witness.

This study explores the experience of children during the school transition period in starting primary school remotely. Positive experiences were inferred based on positive verbal expressions. Children's readiness is marked by the highlights of fun experiences.

3.4.1. Attitude (Impressions and feelings, preferences for learning settings and learning partners)

Male and female students demonstrated a balance in conveying positive and negative impressions. A positive impression is indicated by the responses of happiness with the school-from-home policy. Both boys and girls tended to prefer studying at school, as they could meet their teacher and friends.

Among female students, their teacher became the driving force for their anthusiasm about school. A small number of children, with the majority of girls, chose to study at home, as they could spend more time with their families. The dialog from Ptri (7 yo, girl) and Aurl (7 yo, girl) are the excerpt of dialogue involving two female students.

Children's sense of well-being and positive engagement in learning depends on positive relationships with their educators. A number of studies in different countries revealed various children-educators relationships. Several projects in Singapore (N = 340), Ireland (N = 47), and Australia (N = 311) found that children were motivated to create impressions of their educators and parents [56] [81] [82].

The conversations from Prl (7yo, girl) and Zav (7yo, boy) illustrate a goof relationship between children and their educators (teacher and parent) marked by the preference for learning partners. The first dialogue, Prl (7 yo, girl) stated her preference for studying at school with her teacher. She considered her teacher as a kind and considerate figure. Meanwhile, Zav (7 yo, boy) stated that he preferred studying at home with his parents, as he thought that teacher often scolded him at school, especially when he did not understand the lessons and assignments. On the other hand, he informed that his mother never scolded him.

In South Australia (N = 311), a good relationship between students and their educators influenced their experiences at school. Based on studies in Singapore and Australia, children were mostly unhappy, especially when their teachers yelled and shouted at them [56] [82].

Several studies mentioned the substantial roles of the education system (students, teachers, parents, principals, and support staff) in creating a good atmosphere at schools. A happy school is reflected by the positive attitudes among teachers, especially in promoting kindness, enthusiasm, fairness, inspiration, creativity, and the ability to appear as role models for students [83]. School institutions should consider these criteria for teacher recruitment and evaluation (e.g. personalities, attitudes, and ethics) [84] [85].

Commented [KU11]: Results and Discussion Strengthen the Analysis and Synthesis with Comparisons and Contributions to Science and Technology. Expand the paragraph above in bold but do not change it. Expansion will improve your analysis and synthesis sections; focus on several key points:

Comprehensive Comparison:
Clearly compare your research findings with other studies, both domestic and international. Include research from other countries as comparisons to enrich your analysis and provide a global perspective on your findings.

Relationship to Previous Research:
Explicitly explain whether your findings align with or contradict the research findings you mentioned in the Introduction (State of the Art). You can use phrases such as, "This research aligns with research from A (Year), B (Year), C (Year), etc." Remember, focus on comparing your research data with previous research findings from reputable international journals.

Contributions and Implications:
Each section of your analysis and synthesis should conclude with an explanation of the implications, impact, or contribution of your research results. Make sure to be clear in showing contributions to the development of science and technology (IPTEK).

Commented [KU12]: This paragraph serves as a broad literature review on the topic of exploring children's perspectives. It presents a long list of research topics without a clear focus. While demonstrating the breadth of existing research is good, this approach can make your argument feel unfocused. The paragraph should lead the reader toward a specific gap in the literature that your study aims to fill. Instead of listing every possible topic, you should strategically select and group the most relevant studies to build your case. Additionally, the mix of in-text citations with parenthetical author-year citations is inconsistent and should be standardized according to the chosen style guide.

Commented [KU13]: This paragraph highlights that children can communicate their experiences and that direct conversation with them is a valid research method. This is a crucial point, but it's presented passively. You should frame this section as a defense of your own methodological approach. The current phrasing, "the researchers directly spoke with the children," is generic and could be strengthened by explicitly linking it to your study's methodology. You're not just reporting on what other researchers did; you're justifying your own choice to engage children directly.

Commented [KU14]: This is the most critical paragraph, as it attempts to establish the novelty of your work. The statement that "The exploration of children's perspectives during school transition is a relatively new practice" is a very strong claim that should be directly and explicitly supported by the literature. The final two sentences of this paragraph are a little redundant and should be combined for conciseness. For example, instead of stating it reflects "a considerable consistency" and "also mentioning some issues," you could say it "reveals consistent findings on young children's capacity to share valuable information, including challenges they witness." This makes the statement more direct and impactful.

Commented [KU15]: This final paragraph is meant to be a summary of your study's scope, but it's the weakest part of the text. It's abrupt and contains a key methodological flaw. The statement that "Positive experiences were inferred based on positive verbal expressions" is an oversimplified and unscientific way to describe qualitative analysis. You need to explain the systematic process you used to analyze the children's responses (e.g., thematic analysis, content analysis). Simply saying you "inferred" based on "positive verbal expressions" suggests a lack of rigorous methodology. The phrase "Children's readiness is marked by the highlights of fun experiences" is also a significant logical leap and lacks a clear theoretical basis. It's a statement that requires strong evidence and a more nuanced explanation, not a simple assertion. This part of the text must be re-evaluated to reflect a more scientifically sound approach to data interpretation.

Various psychological, social, economic, physical, and organizational factors are associated with children's positive experience at "school". Moral qualities, such as gratitude can add value to increasing happiness [86]. Schools that can promote a "supportive community" will offer children a higher rate of satisfaction and motivate them to complete their academic goals [87] [88] [89]. Creativities and initiatives from school components in providing specific workshops for students, such as games, group sports, an attractive school environment, and good reading materials will elevate happiness at schools [90].

Functioning as learning environments during the pandemic situation, schools and/or home should be able to manifest an ideal conduct of education. A learning environment marks a context that supports the required learning processes to achieve desired learning results. It is important to perceive home as a space that motivates and stimulates children to learn by supporting their learning activities. The basic requirement for a learning space should promote a space that students can sit on [91].

During learning from home, children's interactions with people mark an important feature for the provision of affection, security, encouragement, conversations, and positive role models to help them thrive. A good home learning environment encourages children and young people to have positive attitudes to learning, grow their curiosity, and boost their confidence [92].

3.4.2. Favored activities among children during school-from-home

Children described the activities that they liked and disliked during the school-from-home period. Several favored activities consisted of playing with gadgets, watching television, playing mobile games, free playing with friends, helping parents, doing positive activities (searching for eels, cycling, watering flowers), studying with family (parents, siblings), learning new skills, learning online, and reciting the Koran. Meanwhile, the undesired conditions included the quiet and boring atmosphere at home, the unpleasant treatment from relatives (fighting over toys, mischievous acts), prohibition from playing outside due to the virus, household chores (sweeping, babysitting), lack of attention from parents, napping, and free time. A total of 18 children stated that they liked all activities.

The boredom of learning in children was reported, as children spent their time without the companionship of friends. Studying with peers is different from studying with parents. Positive competition between peers encourages children to learn better. In addition, peers have a considerable influence on various children's behaviors [93]. Kim, et al. [94] revealed that children who received greater affection and emotional support from friends have a better quality of life compared to those who were constantly bullied.

When children play and learn new activities, partners also determine the quality of experiences. In this study, children were inquired about their preferences for learning settings and learning partners. Children tended to choose outdoor activities for their favored learning area to enable them to socialize with their friends. Sugiyo Pranoto and Hong [95] found that Indonesian children preferred learning with their friends. In particular, girls also mentioned teachers as their favorite learning partners. It is confirmed that children enjoy social interaction while playing to encourage positive impressions and emotions.

In the school-from-home context, teachers should enlighten parents on how they can become good learning partners for their children. Parental assistance will facilitate a successful school transition [96] [97] [98] [99] [100] [101] [102] [103].

Machmudah, et al. [104] evaluated the distance learning activities during the pandemic in Surabaya, Indonesia and concluded that the approach was no better than face-to-face learning due to the lack of learning interaction and organization. Parents required assistance in preparing their children's readiness for school, in which the guidance could employ learning videos. Kluczniok and Roßbach [105] emphasized the importance of parental supports, involvement, and collaboration with the teachers in optimizing the stimulation given to children during the learning process at home.

Family involvement is an essential support in providing various learning facilities and stimuli for children's development prior to school transition [106]. In order to achieve quality services for early childhood education and care, the involvement of parents and the surrounding community is substantial for designing, implementing, and evaluating these services [107]. After all, parents are the key players who decide whether or not their children should attend preschool services.

Cowan, et al. [108] marked several factors that might hinder children's adaptation during the first year at school, such as authoritative parenting, children autonomy issue, low quality of parental relationships (parent-parent and parents-children relationships), and children's perceptions about the relationships. Other research also focused on several aspects of home environment that might determine the transition to school [109] [110] [111] [112] [108].

Most likely, children are more interested in activities outside home, which are not related to schoolwork, for instance, playing during leisure. Friendship is related to the quality of children's life since peer influence is considered significant. Lee and Han [113] noted that children who received high-quality support

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Commented [KU16]: 1. Improve Narrative Flow and Data Integration
The first two paragraphs present a mix of your findings and general statements. It's confusing to read about a "balance" of positive and negative impressions and then immediately find that both boys and girls "tended to prefer studying at school." A better approach is to state your key finding directly and then use your quotes as evidence. The current structure is choppy, with quotes dropped in without enough context or analysis.
•**Suggestion:** Start with a strong topic sentence that synthesizes your findings. For example: "Our findings indicate a general preference among students for in-person schooling, primarily driven by the desire for social interaction." Then, use the anecdotes from Ptri and Aurl not as standalone points, but as specific examples that illustrate this larger theme. This transforms your writing from a simple report into a compelling analysis.

2. Connect Your Findings to the Literature
You cite a good number of studies in the following paragraphs, but they often appear as standalone facts. The reader has to work to find the connection between what you found and what others have published. A strong discussion section uses the literature to support, contrast, or elaborate on your own results.
•**Suggestion:** Instead of just listing what other studies found, directly connect their findings to your own. For example, in the paragraph about the good relationship between students and educators, explicitly state: "Our findings on the importance of educator-student relationships align with the 'Starting School Project' in Australia, which found that positive interactions are crucial to a child's school experience." This makes your argument more authoritative. Similarly, the anecdote from Zav is a perfect opportunity to discuss the concept of "good relationship" in more detail and how the teacher's behavior affected the student's preference.

3. Consolidate and Refocus Vague Paragraphs
Some of the paragraphs are too general and could be consolidated or removed to improve the paper's focus. The paragraphs on what makes a "happy school" (e.g., positive teacher attitudes, community, etc.) and the benefits of a "good home learning environment" are too broad for a focused discussion. While they provide context, they don't directly analyze your specific data.
•**Suggestion:** These ideas are better woven into other paragraphs. For instance, the paragraph about a happy school could be integrated with your discussion of positive educator-student relationships. The paragraphs on home learning could be combined with your discussion of children's attitudes toward studying at home, offering a deeper analysis of why some children might prefer to stay home. This streamlines your argument and eliminates unnecessary repetition.

4. Strengthen Your Language and Professional Tone
Your writing is clear, but it can be more formal and precise. Phrases like "a goof relationship" and "a small number of children, with the majority of girls" are informal and can be easily improved.
•**Suggestion:** Use more professional language. Instead of "a goof relationship," use "a positive relationship." Instead of "a small number of children," be more specific, or if you can't, use a phrase like "a subset of children." Also, ensure you are presenting your findings with the correct nuance. For example, when you use a quote, briefly explain what it illustrates about the child's feeling or impression. This turns a simple quote into meaningful evidence.

from their peers had fewer social problems and dissatisfaction along with the enhanced feelings of psychological well-being.

Another possibility of school happiness offers a smooth transition to primary school. Previous positive experiences during Early Childhood Education will leave a good impression on children, where a positive school experience promotes happiness. The positive correlation between school experience and happiness confirms the previous findings by considering other variables [114] [115].

This study as a research on children's perspectives related to school transition, this study could provide an important statement in determining further school policy. Two studies in the US [39] [116] offer a strong evidence that children's learning outcomes depend on their perspectives about their educators and their schools, suggesting that schools should acknowledge children's points of views and emotions, including their perspectives about school transition.

This study applied a technique where students answering questions on the broad which have been used effectively by researchers to elicit children's perspectives [117]. There is an evidence of consistency between children's comments on their experiences based on their drawings [117]. This approach could be adopted regularly throughout the school years to promote the acknowledgments on children's aspirations, to explore the changes of their experiences of schooling gradually [118] [57], and to address any losses of competencies and skills that some children may experience in the first year [53]. Finally, this study encourages all stakeholders to include multiple perspectives, including children's aspirations in the learning process [57].

3.4.3. Favored activities among children at school following the pandemic

Male and female students emphasised different activities in first-day at school. Boys tended to favor sports-related activities. Meanwhile, girls preferred free play activities with their peers, such as drawing, painting, and dancing. Referring to several conversations with Arg (7 yo, boy) and Njw (7 yo, girl), both students reflected indifference towards quarrelling and negative treatments from their peers.

Other relevant studies emphasized friendship as an essential factor affecting all samples (boys and girls). The "Starting School project" in Australia (N = 300+), in addition to studies in New Zealand (N = 23), Singapore (N = 310 + 340), and Europe (N = 48) highlighted the importance of friendship at school [82] [55] [56] [57] [119] [120] [121]. A very small ethnographic research project (N = 23) in New Zealand found that friendships were important to support children's school transition [122]. In several countries, children were concerned if they could not start friendships [121] [120] [119] [118] [117] [56] [123] [82] in addition to being unhappy when they did not have friends (Dockett & Perry, 2002b).

A study in the UK (N = 50) discovered a higher rate of happiness among children who started school with friends compared to those who did not. Moreover, they found it easier to settle into a class with long-term friends (Fabian, 2000); A study in Hong Kong study (N = 32) mentioned that children were happy when they learned something new and play with their friends. However, the unstructured plays were reduced once they had settled into school even though their peer relationships played a significant role throughout the year [124].

In this research, boys mentioned several negative responses related to school following the pandemic, including loads of work and studies. Meanwhile, girls mentioned several issues, such as difficulty in starting a friendship, uncomfortable treatment by their friends, and long-term activities.

Some children found it hard to deal with the long-term activities and their responsibilities when starting school. Singaporean children (302 out of 340) mentioned long-hour learning as a difficult challenge during their first year, but 40% (142 out of 302) of these children saw school as a place for serious learning [82]. The children also complained about the unavailability of napping time and food at school unlike at the kindergarten [82]. In Singapore, children attended kindergartens for two to four hours daily. In contrast, they had to spend around five hours in the first year of their formal schooling, either in the morning [7.30 am – 1.00 pm] or in the afternoon (1.00 pm – 6.30 pm).

The two dialogues from Mn (7yo, girl) and Alf (7yo, boy) illustrate something in common. When children started the first day in their first grade, their impressions highlighted tiresome activities at school due to a lot of assignments. This study does not report the differences in the learning duration between preschool and primary school. Children preferred free play to formal activities, as they tended to associate formal learning with school. Kindergarten children in Iceland (N = 48) perceived 'schoolwork', consisting of reading, writing, and arithmetic. In terms of learning, organization, size, and structure, they saw school as a more serious and difficult period compared to kindergarten [125].

Several studies mentioned that children associated school with formal learning, such as a study involving children in Ireland (N = 47) that revealed free play as the dominant activity at school, while the rest of the time was perceived as 'working' or 'listening' time [81]. The play-work dichotomy also emerged in Australia, in which 83 out of 100 children disliked 'work' due to limited choices or interests [56]. Children in Germany [126] and Italy (N = 21) (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000) saw kindergarten as a place to play and school as a place to learn. Children in the UK (N = 70) associated school with 'work' and 'hard work' [57], while children in New Zealand (N = 23) complained about the limited time allocated for play activities at school (Peters, 2000).

Commented [KU17]: 1. Synthesize Your Findings Instead of Listing Them
The first paragraph begins by listing the favored and unfavored activities of the children. This is a great starting point, but it reads like a simple restatement of the results. The discussion section's purpose is to *interpret* those results. Instead of a list, you should group and analyze the themes. For example, your list of favored activities includes "playing with gadgets," "playing mobile games," and "watching television," while the unfavored activities include "household chores" and "babysitting." A more insightful discussion would observe a pattern here, such as: "Our findings suggest that children preferred activities that offered a sense of autonomy and entertainment, as evidenced by their preference for screen time and gaming. Conversely, they disliked activities that felt like work or responsibility, such as chores and looking after siblings." This goes beyond the data to reveal an underlying truth about their experience.
2. Create a Clearer, More Logical Flow
The paragraphs jump from one topic to the next without smooth transitions. You move from children's boredom to the importance of peers, then to learning partners, then to the role of parents, and so on. A good discussion section builds a coherent argument. Start with your most significant finding and connect it to the literature. For example, if your most important finding is the children's preference for social interaction, you should group all paragraphs related to peer relationships, friends, and learning partners together, and use them to build a strong case about the importance of social learning. This will prevent the discussion from feeling like a series of disconnected facts.
3. Strengthen Claims with More Nuanced Language
Some of your claims are very broad and could benefit from more specific and nuanced language. For example, the statement "It is confirmed that children enjoy social interaction while playing to encourage positive impressions and emotions" is too definitive. A more academic phrasing would be, "Our findings align with existing research confirming that social interaction during play is a key contributor to children's positive emotions and school impressions." You're not confirming a universal truth; you're showing how your findings fit into the existing body of knowledge. Similarly, the claim "Another possibility of school happiness offers a smooth transition to primary school" is vague. It's not a "possibility"; it's a known correlation. Use stronger language like, "A positive correlation between school happiness and a smooth transition to primary school has been well-established."
4. Integrate Your Unique Context More Effectively
You have a unique and valuable context: children in Central Java, Indonesia, during the COVID-19 school-from-home period. While you mention this, much of the discussion is based on studies from Singapore, Australia, and the UK. While these are relevant, your discussion should consistently tie back to the specific cultural and policy context of Indonesia. For example, when you discuss parental involvement, you could analyze what this means specifically in Central Java, given the economic and cultural factors you mentioned in the introduction. How do your findings differ from or align with research from other countries? This adds significant value and originality to your paper.
5. Conclude with a Powerful Summary and Future Direction
The final two paragraphs of your discussion are good, but they could be more impactful. The final sentences feel a bit like an afterthought. You can strengthen your conclusion by creating a summary that ties together the main themes of your discussion. You've presented a great deal of information on the importance of social interaction, parental involvement, and children's autonomy. Your conclusion should restate these key findings and then clearly lay out the practical implications for policymakers, parents, and educators in Indonesia. What should be done next? Your statement about the need to "promote the acknowledgments on children's aspirations" is a perfect concluding point, but it should be part of a broader, more powerful summary that encapsulates the entire discussion.

A study in Hong Kong revealed that children (N = 32) were eager to learn at school, yet they were not fond of the structured lessons and the quantity of homework [124]. A total of 38 out of 340 (14%) Singaporean children complained about more works at school and found it difficult to complete the assignments [82].

In Australia, 31 out of 100 (31%) children said that they liked school when educators let them select their activity preferences, yet 83 (83%) children said that they did not like the assignments given by the teachers, which were considered boring, while they had no other choices [56].

4.   CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, Some students demonstrated positive and negative attitudes (impressions and emotions). Based on the finding, more than half students preferred studying at school due to the presence of friends, teachers, activities that could improve their skills, and food stalls. Children generally preferred doing several activities at school, such as sports, free plays during recess, arts, thematic learning, snacking time, learning with fun teachers, studying with friends, having extra activities, and helping teachers. Children experienced some unpleasing moments at school, such as the difficulty in making friends, uncomfortable treatment, lots of tasks and assignments that required long duration of learning, sanctions from the teachers, lack of fun in certain events, noise, napping, art learning, and absence of fun activities during free time.

During the school-from-home, children's preferred a number of activities, including playing with gadgets, watching television, playing mobile games, playing with friends, helping parents, getting involved in positive activities (searching for eels, cycling, watering flowers), studying with family members (parents, siblings), learning new skills, learning online, and reciting the Koran. There were several situations that they disliked, including the quiet and boring condition of the house, the unpleasant treatment from relatives (messing around with toys, mischief), the prohibition from playing outside due to the virus, household chores (sweeping, babysitting), lack of attention from parents, too much napping, and the time when they had nothing to do.

Referring to the previous literatures, this research suggests potential practices regarding the children's perspectives on school transition, including the exploration of children's reactions to the changes in their physical environment (e.g. pandemic situation), the provision of assistance to support their adaptation to school norms, the support to encourage them start friendship, the encouragement to establish positive relationships with their new educators and peers, the exploration on how children cope with changes throughout school routines, the provision of support to ensure that children, know whom to talk to if they experience bullying during school transition period, the facilitation of formal learning process, the assistance to educate children confidently adapt with their morning routines before going to school, and the involvement of parents as learning partners during the school transition process.

Based on this current study, we provide some components of transition for determining relevant school policy. As a research on children's perspectives related to school transition, this study could provide an important statement in determining further school policy.

Getting the children prepared

This study encourages the children's perspectives about starting school and aspirations about their parents, friends, and teacher. Eliciting children's views during the transition period and the first year of school could provide them an understanding on their responsibilities. Children tend to perceive what they find hard, easy, or fun in relations to start learning at school and home, the school day, and their learning partners, their experiences on starting friendships, and their attitude for school from home.

Preparing for school and home

The findings could assist educators to acknowledge children's views on the first year of their school transition during pandemic. An interview technique by asking starter questions, may generate the big picture on the students' needs. Research show that children could provide clear and substantial responses regarding their first-year experiences at school. This study offers an overview when children started their first grade at two learning settings, school and home.

Preparing the education system

This study encourages all stakeholders to include multiple perspectives. Children can identify specific physical, social, cultural, and academic aspects of school that they perceive as challenges or supports. Meanwhile, schools can use this information to acknowledge different needs among children. This information should also be shared with the children's families to provide them clarity on how school can respond to the needs of every child as a unique individual.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Commented [KU18]: 1. Integrate Your Findings and the Literature
The first paragraph presents your findings about boys and girls' favored activities but then immediately jumps to a general finding about friendship from other studies. This creates a disconnect. Instead of presenting your data and then a list of external findings, you should **integrate your findings directly with the existing literature**. For example, after stating that boys prefer sports and girls prefer free play, you can transition by saying something like: "These gender-based preferences are an important component of a broader theme, as other studies highlight the critical role of peer relationships and friendships in successful school transitions." This approach makes your findings part of a larger, coherent argument, demonstrating that your data confirms or extends previous research. The section on indifference to quarreling also feels out of place; you should either explain its significance or move it to a more relevant section.
2. Strengthen Your Claims with More Specifics and Analysis
The later paragraphs, especially the fourth, fifth, and sixth, are heavy on data points from other studies without a strong analytical voice connecting them. For example, you list a series of negative responses from boys and girls, but you don't interpret what these differences mean. Are the differences significant? Do they reflect different coping mechanisms or different expectations? Similarly, when ... [2]

Commented [KU19]: These two paragraphs effectively summarize your key findings. However, they read more like a simple restatement of your results section rather than a concluding analysis. A conclusion should go beyond just listing findings; it should interpret them and synthesize the major themes.
•**Suggestion:** Combine these two paragraphs into a single, cohesive one. Instead of separate lists of likes and dislikes for school and home, identify the core themes that emerge from both environments. For example, your findings suggest a common thread: children strongly prefer activities that offer **autonomy, social interaction, and fun**, whether in person or at home. Conversely, they dislike activities that feel like **work, isolation, or a lack of freedom**. This analytical approach is much more powerful than a simple list and demonstrates a deeper understanding of your data.

Commented [KU20]: 2. Implications & Recommendations (Paragraph 3)
This paragraph is a strong attempt to translate your findings into practical recommendations. However, the list format and the use of the word "suggests" make it feel a bit weak and informal. A conclusion should be more authoritative in its recommendations.
•**Suggestion:** Rephrase this into a more assertive, prose-based section. Instead of a list of bullet points, group related recommendations under subheadings. For example, recommendations about making friends and building relationships with educators could be grouped under a heading like "**Fostering Social-Emotional Development**." Recommendations about formal learning and routines could be under a heading like "**Structuring the Learning Environment**." This organization makes your suggestions more professional and easier for the reader to digest.

Commented [KU21]: 3. Framing the Contribution (Paragraphs 4-7)
These paragraphs, under the headings "Getting the children prepared," "Preparing for school and home," and "Preparing the education system," are the most important part of your conclusion. They clearly state your study's contribution and its practical applications. However, the current headings and prose are a bit clunky and could be more precise.
•**Suggestions:**
•
•**Revise Headings:** The current headings are a bit awkward. Consider rephrasing them to be more direct and action-oriented, such as **"Implications for School Policy," "Practical Guidelines for Educators,"** and **"Engaging All Stakeholders."**
•**Strengthen the Language:** The first sentence of the fourth paragraph, "Based on this current study, we provide some components of transition for determining relevant school p... [3]

and Agreement/Contract No. 125/E5/PG.02.00.PT/2022 dated on 10 May 2022 and the Contract Agreement No. DIPA-SIP.DIP-02317.2.690523/2022 dated on 17 November 2021.

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