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# Insights in Social Science

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# Practice and Exploration of AI-Empowered English Literature Selected Readings Teaching Under the OBE Concept: A Case Study of the Instructional Paradigm for Gulliver' Travels

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**Abstract:** In the era where artificial intelligence (AI) technology is reshaping the educational landscape, traditional English literature selected readings teaching is in urgent need of innovation. Guided by the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) framework, this study explores a new AI-empowered teaching model for English literature. Using *Gulliver's Travels* as the core teaching case, the paper designs and implements a comprehensive instructional pathway that integrates intelligent guided reading, multi-theoretical critical analysis, and creative writing. By incorporating mainstream domestic AI dialogue platforms and intelligent writing assistance tools, this model aims to systematically cultivate students' critical thinking and creative writing abilities. Practice has shown that this paradigm can effectively guide students to deconstruct texts in depth, establish connections between classic literature and contemporary issues, thereby significantly enhancing their literary criticism literacy and innovative expression skills. This research provides an actionable model for reference in the reform of English literature teaching in the digital age.

**Keywords:** outcome-based education; AI-empowerment; *Gulliver's Travels*; critical thinking; creative writing; English literature teaching

## 1. Introduction

Currently, a new wave of technological transformation, driven by generative artificial intelligence (AI), is reshaping the global educational ecosystem and paradigms. The deep integration of AI and teaching has become a core force driving the improvement of educational quality and paradigm innovation (Kong & Yang, 2025). This

transformation is not merely about the application of technological tools; it fundamentally signifies a shift from a "teacher-centered instruction" model to one focused on "student-centered deep-learning". English literature teaching should leverage AI to stimulate contemporary students' learning interest, guide them in profound thinking, and cultivate their innovative capabilities and critical abilities. China's

*National Standards for Teaching Quality of Foreign Language and Literature Majors in Higher Education* has long explicitly set mandatory requirements for developing students' literary text analysis skills, critical thinking and innovative expression, making the reform of literature courses an urgent imperative.

Against this macro backdrop, two key trends provide direction and support for the reform of English literature teaching. Firstly, there is a growing consensus within international organizations and the global higher education community on establishing a framework for "AI Competency". In 2024, UNESCO prospectively released the AI Competency Framework for Students and the AI Competency Framework for Teachers, providing guidelines for global education systems in the AI era. The student framework emphasizes cultivating core competencies such as "Human-centered Thinking" and "AI Ethics", while the teacher framework identifies "AI Pedagogy" as a key competency, requiring educators to design and implement innovative teaching strategies that deeply integrate AI into the classroom to foster students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Wang, 2025). The Chinese educational community has actively responded, systematically exploring "AI-driven New Educational Paradigms" and striving to transform AI from an auxiliary tool into an engine for pedagogical change. Secondly, China has implemented strong strategic planning and policy guidance at the national level for "AI + Education". In 2025, nine departments including the Ministry of Education jointly issued the Opinions on Accelerating the Digitalization of Education, explicitly proposing to "promote AI-assisted educational transformation", advance the deep integration of AI technology into all elements and the entire process of teaching and learning, and particularly emphasize "prioritizing teachers and students to enhance digital literacy and skills for all citizens". This top-level national design marks China's entry into a phase of large-scale, in-depth practice in AI-empowered education.

Confronted with these epochal demands and technological waves, the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) concept provides a solid yet flexible anchor for reforming English literature teaching. OBE emphasizes designing curriculum and instruction backwards from the final learning outcomes and competencies students are expected to achieve, shifting the focus from knowledge transmission to the cultivation of literacy and capabilities. This aligns perfectly with the essence of literary education—enhancing humanistic literacy, shaping critical thinking, and stimulating innovative expression. The empowerment of AI technology, particularly through the mature applications of domestic intelligent education platforms in areas like text analysis, virtual dialogue, and personalized tutoring, offers unprecedented possibilities for achieving higher-order teaching objectives under the OBE framework. (Shen, 2024) It can not only liberate students from the superficial labor of information retrieval but also guide them toward deep interpretation of textual meaning, cross-temporal critical dialogue, and insightful personalized expression.

Conventional teaching approaches are often inadequate for facilitating the in-depth exploration of the complex historical narratives and philosophical inquiries embedded within literary texts. (Jiang & Wang, 2023) The Outcome-Based Education (OBE) framework, however, offers a targeted structure for reform by employing backward design principles, where curriculum development starts with defining the high-order competencies students should ultimately master. Simultaneously, the convergence of domestic AI tools and intelligent teaching platforms presents new opportunities for fostering immersive and inquiry-based literature classrooms. (Hao, 2025) These technologies enable the simulation of historical contexts, provide support for nuanced textual analysis, and facilitate creative expression, thereby making profound engagement with classically rich, allusive, and dialogic texts such as *Gulliver's Travels* a tangible reality. Based on this integrated perspective, this paper selects Jonathan

Swift's classic *Gulliver's Travels* as its core teaching case. The work's rich satirical artistry, profound utopian thought experiments, and diverse narrative perspectives make it an excellent textbook for cultivating students' critical thinking and creative expression. (Zhang & Zhao, 2024) This research aims to explore how to combine the OBE concept, international AI literacy frameworks, and the practical requirements of China's localized "AI + Education" initiatives to construct a new teaching model for selected English literature readings. Diverging from a cursory overview of the novel, this study focuses intensively on the *Glubbdubdrib* chapter in Book III. Here, the island's governor possesses the supernatural power to summon the specters of historical figures, allowing Gulliver to engage in direct dialogues with the luminaries of ancient Greece and Rome, as well as more recent heroes. This narrative construct inherently serves as an exemplary pedagogical model: it engages with the evocation of history, the interrogation of truth, and the mirroring of contemporary reality. This research aims to investigate the deep integration of the OBE framework with AI tools. Using the teaching process of the chapter on *Glubbdubdrib* as a paradigm, it seeks to design a systematic instructional scheme that guides students in "conjuring" history, conducting critical dialogue, and generating creative outputs, thus proposing a concrete and actionable pathway for humanities education in an age of intelligence.

## 2. Design of the Teaching Framework Integrating OBE Concepts and AI Empowerment

This study is positioned as a practice-oriented pedagogical exploration. The emphasis of this paper lies in articulating a replicable teaching framework and instructional logic.

### 2.1 Core OBE Principles in Practice

In this model, OBE principles are operationalized not merely as a procedural framework, but as a pedagogical orientation that prioritizes demonstrable learning outcomes over content coverage. (Jiao & Chen, 2023) By foregrounding

what students are expected to do with literary knowledge—rather than what they are expected to know—the OBE approach provides a conceptual rationale for integrating analytical reading, dialogic reasoning, and creative production within a single instructional sequence. On this basis, OBE principles are operationalized as follows:

- **Defining the Final Outcome:** The primary learning outcome is a student-authored creative writing piece (e.g., *A New Dialogue from Glubbdubdrib* or *A Modern Gulliver's Chronicle*). This work must demonstrate deep comprehension of the source text, critical engagement with a contemporary issue, and distinctive literary creativity.
- **Backward-Designed Learning Trajectory:** The path to the final outcome is mapped backwards into three sequenced competency stages: textual analysis, thematic and dialogic reasoning, and creative composition, with each stage comprising tailored activities.
- **Embedded Formative Feedback:** Continuous assessment, facilitated by AI analytics and structured peer review, provides iterative feedback throughout each stage to scaffold the development of the final product. (Wu, 2023)

## 2.2 Construction of an AI-Empowered Instructional Framework

Guided by the principles of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), this study constructs an AI-empowered instructional framework for teaching selected readings in English literature. This framework comprises four interconnected and cyclical components:

### 2.2.1 Learning Objectives Layer

- **Analytical Objective:** To critically deconstruct literary narratives, identifying rhetorical strategies and ideological constructs.
- **Technical Objective:** To employ AI tools effectively for research, ideation, and compositional refinement.
- **Synthetic Objective:** To produce an original creative work that synthesizes literary

emulation, critical social commentary, and personal insight.

### 2.2.2 AI Support Layer

Specific AI tools are deployed strategically across the learning journey to fulfil distinct supportive roles:

**Table 1.** AI Tool Matrix for Supporting the Creative Writing Workflow

Primary Tools	Role in the Three-Phase Process	Operation Example (for Students)	Contribution to Final Outcome
iFlytek Spark	Phase 1: Parses Swift’s satire, rhetoric, and narrative structure. Phase 2: Researches historical figures’ core ideas and contemporary themes.	“Analyze how Swift uses irony in Gulliver’s dialogue with Aristotle in Glubbudrib.” “Summarize Zhuangzi’s views on ‘machine-mind’ in 300 words.”	Ensures the creative work is grounded in rigorous textual analysis and contextual understanding.
Doubao, ERNIE Bot	Phase 2: Creates customizable character agents; generates dialogue prompts and plot ideas.	“Act as Shakespeare and discuss how social media ‘profiles’ relate to ‘all the world’s a stage.’” “Suggest 3 conflict points for a dialogue between Wang Wei and a modern environmentalist.”	Supplies character voices, dialogues, and conceptual sparks to overcome creative blocks.
ERNIE Bot, iFlytek Spark, Doubao	Phase 3: Aids stylistic mimicry, linguistic polishing, and logical coherence; generates images.	“Revise this draft to match Swift’s formal, satirical tone in Glubbudrib.” “Generate an image of Gulliver talking to Shakespeare on a floating island.”	Transforms drafts into polished, stylistically consistent literary pieces with multimodal support.
Lanmo Cloud, Yunbanke	All Phases: Hosts resources, manages submissions, and facilitates peer review.	Upload dialogue archives and draft versions; comment on peers’ work via the platform.	Maintains project progress and systematizes the feedback cycle for iterative revision.

### 2.2.3 Instructional Activity Layer

The core pedagogy is explicitly structured into three phases: Textual Deconstruction → Thematic Pairing & Dialogue → Creative Synthesis and Writing.

### 2.2.4 Assessment Layer

Evaluation employs a balanced approach, weighting the final creative work heavily while also valuing the process portfolio (e.g., analytical notes, dialogue transcripts, revised drafts), thereby assessing both outcome and developmental journey.

### 3. Case Design: Teaching the Glubbudrib

#### Episode

##### 3.1 Preparation

- Learning Situation and Goal Setting: Targeting sophomore English majors who have already developed basic text analysis skills, the goal is set as a progressive task from understanding the narrative of ‘summons’ to completing innovative dialogues.
- AI Resource Integration: Establish a ‘Witch Island Resource Library’ on ‘Lanmo Cloud’; preset historical figure intelligent agents on ‘Doubao’; design a series of prompts templates to guide students to efficiently utilize AI.
- Launching the Final Project: Students are introduced to the culminating task from the outset: to compose a creative narrative titled “A New Dialogue from Glubbudrib: Historical Figure on Contemporary Issue.”
- Roadmapping the Journey: The three-phase learning trajectory is visually presented to students, clarifying how each stage builds toward the final objective.

##### 3.2 Implementation Process

###### 3.2.1 Phase One: Textual Deconstruction – Building the Analytical Foundation

Students employ iFlytek Spark to conduct a close reading, producing a “Narrative Mechanics Report” that deconstructs:

- 1) Selection Logic: What principles guide Swift’s choice of historical figures for Gulliver to interview?
- 2) Interrogative Strategy: How do Gulliver’s questions subvert established historical reputations?
- 3) Satirical Voice: How are tone, irony, and dialogue structure employed to achieve critical distance?
- 4) This report forms the student’s analytical “toolkit” for their own writing.

###### 3.2.2 Phase Two: Thematic Pairing and Simulated Dialogue – Generating Core Content

This phase focuses on connecting past and present through critical dialogue. A structured framework guides students in forming productive conceptual pairs:

Table 2. Framework for Thematic Pairing and Dialogic Content Generation

Contemporary Theme	Suggested Interlocutor & Rationale	Guided Dialogue Prompt	Key Metaphors/Quotes to Extract	Targeted Creative Output
Technology & Human Agency	Zhuangzi (Daoist philosopher) – critiques instrumental rationality and advocates naturalness (ziran).	“Explain your parable of ‘the useless tree’ to a person whose daily life is controlled by algorithms. Why might algorithms harm human ‘naturalness’?”	“Uselessness is true usefulness”; “Machine-mind distorts human nature”; “Spontaneity over calculation”	A dialogue exploring tension between tech efficiency and human potential, using Daoist metaphors.
Social Performance & Identity	William Shakespeare – explores role-playing and identity in theatrical works.	“In ‘As You Like It’, you wrote ‘All the world’s a stage.’ How is a social media ‘profile’ similar to or	“All the world’s a stage”; “Masks of authenticity”; “To be or to seem to be”	A critique of digital self-fashioning, leveraging theatrical metaphors of

		different from the 'roles' you describe?"		performance and authenticity.
Environmental Consciousness	Wang Wei (Tang poet) – embodies “harmony between human and nature” in shanshui(landscape) poetry.	“I live in a city where skyscrapers replace mountains and smog hides the moon. How would you rewrite your poem ‘Moonlight Over the Pine Spring’ for this world?”	“Moonlight filters through pine needles”; “Stream gurgles over stones”; “Nature as spiritual home”	A reflective dialogue contrasting poetic natural harmony with modern ecological alienation.

Student Activity: Choosing a pairing, students use Doubao’s character-agent feature to conduct simulated dialogues, extracting compelling quotes, arguments, and metaphors for their dialogue archive.

**3.2.3 Phase Three: Creative Synthesis – Producing and Refining the Narrative**

- 1) From Archive to Draft: Using their archive, students draft their narrative. ERNIE Bot can assist with expansion: “Develop my conversation with Zhuangzi about smartphones as ‘superfluous appendages’ into an 800-word scene with setting, dramatic tension, and reflection.”
- 2) Stylistic Refinement: A crucial step. Students use iFlytek Spark with a comparative prompt: “Refine my draft’s tone, syntax, and argumentative flow to closer emulate the pointed irony and formal diction found in this excerpt from the Glubbubdrib chapter.”
- 3) Multimodal Presentation & Meta-Cognition (Optional): Students may use Doubao to generate an evocative image for their story. They also submit a “Creative Process Statement” explaining their thematic choices, AI tool usage, and key personal creative decisions.
- 4) Workshop and Revision: In a writing workshop, peers provide feedback on historical plausibility, critical depth, and stylistic success, informing final revisions.

**3.3 Assessment**

Final evaluation synthesizes:

- Final Creative Piece (50%): Assessed for analytical depth, literary quality, originality, and effective synthesis of the OBE process phases.
- Process Portfolio (30%): Comprising the Narrative Mechanics Report, dialogue archive, draft iterations, and the Creative Process Statement.
- Collaborative Engagement (20%): Based on contribution to dialogue exercises and the peer workshop.

**4. Outcomes and Reflective Analysis**

**4.1 Observed Outcomes**

Classroom implementation suggested a noticeable improvement in the overall quality and structural sophistication of student writing. Within the constraints of a practice-based teaching exploration, student work increasingly demonstrated purposeful engagement with Swift’s satirical strategies, more deliberate connections between historical perspectives and contemporary concerns, and a growing awareness of stylistic control in dialogue construction.

Students informally reported reduced anxiety toward the major creative task, indicating that the phased instructional design and AI-supported scaffolding helped make the writing process more transparent and manageable. These observations are

based on classroom practice and reflective teaching analysis rather than formal empirical measurement.

#### 4.2 Reflections and Ongoing Challenges

Key reflections center on maintaining pedagogical balance:

- 1) Between Emulation and Originality: The model must guard against AI-driven stylistic homogeneity. Assessment rubrics must explicitly reward unique student voice and conceptual innovation.
- 2) Between Tool Utility and Critical Autonomy: AI is framed strictly as a scaffold. Course design must ensure core tasks—formulating critical questions, making conceptual connections, evaluating arguments—remain decidedly human and intellectually demanding.

This necessitates the instructor's role evolving into that of a learning architect and meta-cognitive guide for human-AI collaboration.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study presents a viable OBE pathway for literary education that meaningfully integrates generative AI. By treating the chapter on *Glubbdubdrib* as a teachable methodology and implementing a structured “deconstruction-pairing-synthesis” cycle, it guides students in transitioning from analytical readers to reflective creator-critics. The model demonstrates AI's potential not as a replacement for deep learning but as a catalyst for it, providing scalable support for complex competency development. Future iterations could expand this paradigm into comparative or interdisciplinary “textual reinvention” projects, contributing to the ongoing evolution of humanities pedagogy for a digitally mediated world. While the discussion primarily draws on the context of Chinese higher education and locally available AI platforms, the instructional logic and pedagogical sequencing proposed in this study may offer reference value for literature teaching reforms in other educational settings.

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# Parental Controlling Parenting Style and Its Effects on Young Adults' Psychological Autonomy in Co-Residing Households

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**Abstract:** As prolonged co-residence between parents and young adults becomes increasingly common in urban societies, questions arise regarding how this living arrangement influences the psychological development of emerging adults. This study examines the effects of controlling parenting styles—particularly psychological control—on young adults' psychological autonomy within co-residing households. Drawing on developmental theory and cultural perspectives, the paper explores three core components of autonomy: self-directed decision making, emotional separation from parental authority, and the initiation of personal goals. Through a thematic analysis of common tension points, including daily routines, financial planning, and social relationships, the study reveals how young adults experience, negotiate, and adapt to control in intergenerational domestic settings. It further outlines a range of adaptive strategies employed by young adults to assert autonomy, from selective compliance to future-oriented withdrawal. The findings underscore the long-term developmental and relational consequences of sustained parental control during early adulthood and call for a recalibration of familial roles to support autonomy within shared living arrangements.

**Keywords:** psychological autonomy; controlling parenting; co-residence; emerging adulthood; emotional separation; intergenerational dynamics

## 1. Co-Residence and the Transition to Adulthood

The move into adulthood has often been seen as a straight and steady process with clear steps. These steps usually include earning one's own income, finding a full-time job, and moving out to live apart from parents. These signs have long been used to show that a person has reached independence and started to take on adult responsibilities. But in the

modern world, especially in cities and developed areas, this path has become less clear and often much slower. One main sign of this change is that more young adults now keep living with their parents through their twenties and even into their early thirties.

There are many social and economic reasons for this trend. On the economic side, rising housing prices, difficult job markets, and slow growth in starting

salaries make it harder for young people to move out on their own. In East Asian countries like China and South Korea, the high price of housing is one of the biggest barriers to early independence. For example, in large Chinese cities, the average home costs more than twenty times the yearly income of a typical worker. Because of this, many young adults cannot afford to buy or even rent their own place. Longer schooling also adds to this delay, as more people study for higher degrees to improve their chances in the job market. This extra time in school means that many enter full-time work later, which also pushes back financial independence.

But economic reasons alone do not fully explain why so many young adults still live with their parents. Cultural values and family traditions are also very important. In societies shaped by Confucian beliefs, such as those in East and Southeast Asia, family duty and respect for elders are central values. In these cultures, living with one's parents is not usually seen as a sign of weakness or failure. Instead, it is often considered a positive and responsible choice. For example, adult children—especially unmarried daughters or eldest sons—may be expected to stay at home to take care of parents, support family unity, and help with the household. Staying home is often understood as a moral act that shows care and loyalty.

Even though this way of living can offer safety and emotional closeness, it also brings certain tensions. Living with parents can provide comfort, but it can also make it harder for young adults to build independence, which is a key part of personal growth. Developmental researchers have said for a long time that independence is important for forming identity, setting goals, and learning emotional control. Arnett's idea of "emerging adulthood" describes this stage as a period of exploring, defining oneself, and making independent choices. But when young adults continue to live in homes ruled by long-standing hierarchies and parental authority, it becomes harder for them to fully separate and act on their own.

Long-term co-residence can also bring back hidden power struggles inside the family. When parents still have a strong say in how their children live, spend money, or choose friends, young adults may start to feel uncertain about their roles. They might depend too much on their parents emotionally, or they might feel stuck between being dependent and independent. In such cases, the family home is not only a physical space but also a place where control, freedom, and responsibility are constantly being discussed, tested, and rebalanced.

## 2. Understanding Controlling Parenting in Young Adulthood

### 2.1 Psychological vs. Behavioral Control in Parenting

Parental control is a broad and complex idea that shows the different ways parents try to guide or influence their children's growth. In family and developmental psychology, researchers usually divide parental control into two main types: behavioral control and psychological control. These two types have very different effects on how children and young adults develop independence and emotional health.

Behavioral control means that parents guide their children's actions through rules, supervision, and clear expectations. This kind of control helps children learn proper behavior and responsibility. When parents set rules in a warm and supportive way, behavioral control can encourage self-discipline and confidence. It is often linked to consistency, care, and clear communication, which help children behave well and manage themselves in social situations.

Psychological control, on the other hand, works in a very different way. It uses emotional pressure instead of clear structure. Parents who use this kind of control try to influence their children's inner thoughts and feelings rather than their actions. They may make their children feel guilty, withdraw affection, or show love only when the child obeys. They might also use shame or emotional distance to get the child to comply. Over time, this kind of

control weakens a child's ability to think independently and to build a stable sense of self.

This difference becomes very clear in young adulthood, when people begin to explore their identity and make more of their own choices. As children grow older, behavioral control usually decreases because they gain more maturity. But psychological control can continue in softer, more emotional forms. For example, parents may not openly forbid their child from dating someone or choosing a certain career, but they may show disappointment or emotional withdrawal when the child chooses differently. This kind of quiet disapproval is less direct but can still be deeply hurtful because it mixes love with pressure.

Many studies have found that psychological control has negative effects on emotional growth. Soenens and Vansteenkiste (2005) discovered that college students who saw their parents as psychologically controlling reported less independence and more emotional distress, such as anxiety and depression. These effects can be especially strong in families where parents and young adults live together, because daily contact keeps parental authority present. In these homes, control can appear not only through open arguments but also through small emotional signals—constant evaluations, subtle criticism, or silence that carries disapproval. These quiet pressures make young adults feel watched and judged, limiting their ability to act freely.

Psychological control can also affect how young adults relate to others and pursue their goals. People who grow up under this kind of control often seek constant approval from others and find it hard to express their true opinions. They may struggle in friendships or romantic relationships because they fear rejection or conflict. They might also have trouble setting personal goals, since their motivation comes from pleasing others rather than following their own values. Over time, this can lead to emotional dependence and a weak sense of self-worth.

## 2.2 Persistence of Control Beyond Adolescence

Many older theories of development say that parents slowly give up control as children grow up and become adults. But new research shows that some types of control, especially psychological control, can continue long after the teenage years. This is often true in families where young adults still live with their parents. Instead of ending, control may stay the same or even grow stronger. Living together can keep parents involved in their children's daily lives, which makes it easier for control to continue.

In daily life, sharing a home usually means family members must plan together about things like schedules, chores, and money. But these simple tasks often hide deeper power differences that have existed since childhood. Parents who once set bedtimes or study rules may now influence their adult children's work hours, spending, or dating choices. They may say it is for family peace or because the young adult is using the family's money. Even when meant kindly, these actions can repeat old patterns of approval and control. This makes it harder for young adults to feel separate and independent.

Several studies show that this kind of control often continues. In East Asian families, where family duty and emotional closeness are highly valued, young adults often say that parents still take part in their personal choices even after they become adults. Research comparing families in China and Japan found that many young people living with parents often felt emotional pressure when they disagreed with family expectations. This was common in choices about marriage, jobs, or moving to another city. Parents might not argue openly but instead show disappointment, stay silent, or remind children of their sacrifices. These actions are subtle but powerful forms of emotional control.

Other studies also show that parents who were controlling during their children's teenage years often keep doing so later. Data from long-term research suggest that parents who used emotional control when children were younger are likely to keep doing it in their twenties, especially if the adult

child still depends on them for money or housing. Even when these young adults help around the home, they often still feel like they have less power than their parents. Some researchers call this a “developmental limbo,” meaning that young people act like adults but do not fully feel free like adults. This ongoing control also connects to social and cultural conditions. In big cities where housing is expensive, moving out is often too costly for young adults. In cultures that value close family ties, living together is also seen as normal. Under these conditions, the balance between parents and adult children becomes harder to manage. Parents may think they can keep control because their children still live at home, while adult children may feel it is wrong or disrespectful to push for more independence.

Research shows that staying under such control can have serious effects. Young adults who experience ongoing psychological control often report lower confidence, more stress inside, and higher levels of anxiety or sadness. They may also have trouble setting personal limits in friendships or romantic relationships. These problems show that family control can affect how young people relate to others and manage emotions even outside the home.

### 2.3 Cultural Dimensions of Parental Control

The way parental control continues into young adulthood cannot be understood without looking at cultural background. In many societies, ideas about family duty, authority, and personal freedom are deeply shaped by shared values and traditions. What may be seen as overcontrol in one culture can be understood as care or moral guidance in another. In East Asian families, for example, the idea of filial piety places strong emphasis on respect and obedience toward parents. Children are often taught that following parental advice is an expression of gratitude and loyalty. Within this belief system, parents see active involvement in their children’s lives as a duty rather than interference. A father who monitors his adult child’s career choices or a mother who comments on daily routines may genuinely believe that such actions protect family harmony

and ensure the child’s success. However, for young adults, this same involvement can create inner conflict. They may wish to make independent choices, yet also fear being judged as ungrateful or disrespectful.

In contrast, in many Western societies, independence and self-expression are valued more strongly. Parents are often encouraged to support their children’s autonomy, even when their choices differ from family expectations. Open discussion, emotional boundaries, and mutual respect are often seen as signs of maturity on both sides. As a result, the continuation of control beyond adolescence is usually viewed as a problem to be corrected rather than a natural part of family life.

These cultural contrasts do not mean that control exists only in one type of society. Rather, they show how family expectations and emotional bonds are shaped by different moral logics. In collectivist settings, the family is often seen as a single emotional unit, where individual needs are balanced with group stability. In individualist settings, personal growth and choice are treated as important goals in themselves. Both approaches carry benefits and tensions. In the former, emotional security and care are emphasized, but autonomy may be limited. In the latter, freedom is prioritized, but emotional connection can weaken.

Global changes in education, work, and communication are now reshaping these traditional models. Young adults who study abroad or work in urban centers are often exposed to more individual-oriented values. When they return to their families, they may bring new ideas about equality and independence that challenge older expectations. This can lead to silent struggles within the household, where both generations attempt to protect what they value—parents seeking continuity and stability, and young adults seeking growth and self-definition.

Understanding these cultural dimensions helps explain why parental control persists differently across societies. It is not only a matter of personality or family style but also a reflection of shared beliefs about duty, love, and responsibility. In all contexts,

the balance between care and control depends on how families negotiate respect, emotion, and personal space within their own cultural frameworks.

### 3. Core Components of Psychological Autonomy

Psychological autonomy in young adulthood is a complex part of growing up. It is not only about living on one's own or earning money. It is mainly about having an inner sense of control, knowing how to think and act for oneself, and feeling free to make choices without too much outside pressure. It also means being able to handle one's own emotions apart from parents and to follow goals that truly matter to oneself. These parts of autonomy form the inner foundation of what it means to be an adult who can think and act independently.

When young adults live with their parents, especially in families where parents are controlling, these parts of autonomy often grow in limited or uneven ways. Living in the same space makes it easier for old authority patterns to continue. Parents may still see their children as dependent, and children may find it hard to act like equals. Strong family hierarchies and old habits can make it difficult to build relationships that feel balanced and adult-like. Because of this, autonomy should not be seen only as something that comes from within one person. It also develops through everyday interactions and relationships with parents and other family members.

This section explains three main parts of psychological autonomy that are often affected by ongoing parental control. The first is self-directed decision making, which means being able to make one's own choices and accept the results. The second is emotional separation from parental authority, which means learning to manage one's own emotions and not letting parental opinions fully shape one's feelings or sense of worth. The third is the ability to set and follow personal goals and values, which means finding direction in life that feels true to oneself rather than based on others' expectations.

### 3.1 Self-Directed Decision Making

Self-directed decision making means a person's ability to make clear and thoughtful choices that match their own beliefs, preferences, and goals. It is an important sign of independence and personal identity during the shift from youth to adulthood. When young people grow up in homes that support autonomy, they get more chances to make choices in both small and big situations. These experiences help them learn confidence, responsibility, and a stable sense of who they are.

But in families where parents use psychological control, this process often becomes limited or distorted. Parents may not directly say "no" to certain choices, but they may use emotions to control behavior. They might show guilt, disappointment, or quiet disapproval to push their children toward certain decisions. When a parent's love or approval depends on obedience, young adults begin to follow others' rules instead of their own values. This makes it harder for them to trust their own judgment and feel in control of their choices.

Research that follows people over time supports this idea. For example, a study by Zimmer-Gembeck and Collins (2003) showed that teenagers who had mothers who often tried to control them were more likely to feel unsure about their future jobs and avoid making career decisions as young adults. These effects became stronger when the young adults still lived with their parents. In such homes, parents remained part of both small daily decisions, like what to eat or how to spend free time, and larger choices, like choosing a major in college or applying for jobs.

Living together also increases the chances for criticism and close observation, even about small things. For instance, if a young woman decides to go out with friends late at night, a controlling parent might make small comments about how that shows poor judgment or lack of values. These words may sound like concern, but they often carry a moral tone that makes the young adult feel judged. Over time, this can create anxiety and lead them to act in ways

that please others rather than express who they really are.

In cultures that value family closeness and respect for elders, these situations can be even more complicated. In many East Asian families, following parents' wishes is seen as a sign of respect, not as a loss of independence. But newer research shows that even in these societies, too much parental control is linked to lower confidence in decision making, mixed emotions, and a strong need for parents' approval among young adults.

When young people rarely have the chance to make their own low-risk decisions, they may later find it hard to set goals or trust their choices. They may depend too much on others for guidance or approval. Over time, their motivation may come more from pressure inside rather than from true personal interest. Deci and Ryan (2000) describe this as "introjected regulation," where people act to avoid guilt or seek approval instead of doing things that truly matter to them. (Deci, E. L. and Ryan, R. M., 2000)

### 3.2 Emotional Separation from Parental Authority

Emotional separation, also called individuation, is an important part of growing into adulthood. It means that young people learn to create clear emotional boundaries from their parents while still keeping love, care, and respect for them. It is different from emotional detachment, which means coldness or rejection. Emotional separation is about being able to think differently, manage one's own feelings, and follow personal values without feeling guilty, afraid, or dependent.

This kind of independence is especially important for young adults who live with their parents. In shared homes, parents and children spend a lot of time together, which keeps emotional closeness strong. But this closeness can make it harder to separate emotionally. When families already have patterns of control or emotional closeness that are too strong, living together can bring back old habits from childhood. As a result, it becomes difficult for young adults to see their own emotions and

opinions as separate from their parents' feelings and expectations.

Bowen's Family Systems Theory helps explain this situation. (Bowen, M., 1978) Bowen believed that when people in a family have low emotional separation, they become emotionally "fused." This means that one person's emotions can easily influence others, making it hard for each family member to think clearly or handle stress independently. In such families, when a young adult tries to express a different opinion or make a personal choice, parents may see it as disrespect or betrayal. Because of this, the child may feel guilty or pressured to agree, even when they do not want to. These emotional patterns are especially common in cultures where family closeness and shared values are very important. In East Asian societies shaped by Confucian traditions, for example, following family wishes and keeping harmony are seen as signs of respect. Many young adults feel that obeying their parents' expectations is part of being a good person. But this can cause inner conflict when their personal dreams or beliefs differ from what their parents want.

A study by Uji et al. (2006) found that Japanese and Chinese young adults who lived with their parents after their mid-twenties often felt more anxious when making personal decisions, such as choosing a partner, job, or political view. (Uji, M. et al., 2006) Many said they felt afraid to disagree with their parents because they worried about guilt, shame, or losing emotional support. They often stayed silent or gave in to avoid conflict.

These emotional struggles often come not from strict rules but from unspoken thoughts and habits. Many young people grow up believing things like, "If I disagree, I'll hurt my parents," or "If I make my own choice, they'll think I'm ungrateful." These beliefs slowly build a conditional sense of self, where a person's worth depends on how much they please their parents.

Research also shows that this emotional closeness can affect other relationships. Young adults who lack emotional separation may have trouble forming close romantic bonds, speaking up at work, or

making independent choices in friendships. They may avoid disagreement and focus too much on pleasing others because they have learned to hide their true feelings. This pattern starts in the family and spreads to other parts of life.

When parents and adult children live together, this emotional closeness can become even more complicated. The lack of space and privacy makes it harder to set boundaries. Even small talks about clothes, food, or weekend plans can turn into emotional moments if parents show disapproval or make moral comments. Over time, adult children may choose to stay quiet or agree just to keep peace at home. These actions may help avoid arguments but often make them feel less genuine or true to themselves.

### 3.3 Initiation of Personal Goals and Values

The third part of psychological autonomy is starting personal goals and values. It means not only saying no to outside control but also finding one's own sense of purpose. It is the inner drive to follow goals that match what a person truly believes in, even when these goals are different from what parents or society expect.

This process includes several important steps. A young person must first understand and accept their own beliefs, then choose goals that feel meaningful to them, and learn to face uncertainty and mistakes without giving up. In terms of development, it shows the move from doing what others want to doing what one personally finds valuable.

According to Self-Determination Theory, real autonomy is not just the freedom from pressure. It also means having a feeling of choice and acting in ways that match one's true self. When parents allow choices only under strict limits—such as saying, “You can choose, but only within these rules”—young adults often take in those limits as their own. They start to act out of guilt or fear instead of genuine interest. As a result, they may set goals that please their parents but do not truly satisfy them. Over time, this can lead to stress, anxiety, and exhaustion from trying to meet others' standards.

Research supports this connection between parental psychological control and low motivation. In a study by Van Petegem et al. (2015) that looked at college students living with their parents in different countries, those who felt higher levels of parental control showed less enthusiasm and satisfaction in their studies and career planning. (Van Petegem, S. et al., 2015) Many said they chose “safe” goals that their parents approved of instead of goals that matched their own skills or passions. This kind of compromise often led to a lack of energy and interest in what they were doing.

Starting and following one's own goals also requires the freedom to try, fail, and learn. But in families where strict parents see mistakes as disobedience or irresponsibility, young adults may avoid taking chances altogether. They might stay in their comfort zone to avoid criticism or emotional distance from their parents. Over time, this fear of risk makes it harder for them to find clear goals or develop strong ambitions. Their sense of identity becomes weak and easily shaken, as it depends too much on whether others approve of them.

### 4. Points of Tension in Co-Residing Family Life

In families where young adults keep living with their parents after adolescence, daily life often turns into a process of quiet negotiation. Sometimes, it also becomes a space of silent conflict about control, privacy, and personal growth. While living together often begins for practical reasons such as saving money or helping with care, it can also bring back old family power patterns. These long-standing roles can make it harder for young adults to gain a sense of independence and adult identity.

When parents hold on to strong authority or emotional influence, tension does not always appear through open arguments. It often builds up through small daily moments—when parents question routines, enter rooms without asking, or make comments about choices. These small actions add up over time and affect how the young adult feels about control and respect in the home. The way family members share time, space, and routines can quietly

shape whether the young adult feels like a real adult or still a child under supervision.

#### **4.1 Control Over Daily Routines and Personal Space**

One of the clearest and most emotional areas of conflict in shared households is control over daily routines and personal space. Family rules about cleanliness, punctuality, or shared meals often seem normal and well-intended. But when these rules are applied without open discussion, they can become a form of control. For young adults who are trying to form their own habits and lifestyles, such rules can feel limiting and even invasive.

For example, a 26-year-old graduate student in Shanghai may be told by her parents to eat breakfast with them every morning at 7:30, even though she studies late at night. When she refuses, her parents do not argue directly. Instead, they use quiet disapproval—through sighs, remarks, or silence—to show their dissatisfaction. These small acts suggest that obedience, not mutual understanding, is expected. Over time, these repeated interactions make the young adult feel that her daily schedule is not her own. Her time and choices begin to feel controlled by the expectations of others.

Similar tensions appear when it comes to managing private space. A bedroom, which should belong to the adult child, may still be seen as part of the parents' domain. Parents might walk in without knocking, rearrange items while "cleaning," or comment on the room's condition or decoration. These acts might seem harmless, but they carry quiet messages of power and control. They suggest that parents still have the final say in spaces that are supposed to represent independence.

From a psychological point of view, these intrusions weaken the boundaries that help a person form a clear and separate identity. According to Boundary Regulation Theory, being able to decide who enters one's space and how one uses one's time is key to feeling in control and building a strong sense of self. When young adults are denied this control, even in subtle ways, they may start to feel less capable of managing their own lives. Their room and routines

may no longer feel like expressions of who they are, but like temporary privileges allowed by their parents.

In many cultures that value family harmony and respect for elders, these issues are rarely confronted directly. Instead, young adults often deal with them quietly. They may avoid certain topics, spend less time at home, or go along with rules they do not agree with. On the surface, this keeps peace in the home, but underneath it creates frustration and emotional distance. The gap between outward politeness and inner resistance becomes a common feature of life in shared family households.

#### **4.2 Discrepancies in Financial and Life Planning Autonomy**

Beyond daily routines, another major source of tension appears when parents continue to influence financial choices and long-term life plans. In many families where young adults still live with their parents, money and emotional ties often become mixed. When parents pay for housing, education, or living costs, their financial help often comes with expectations about obedience, respect, and family duty.

In these homes, young adults may feel trapped between two opposing forces. They receive material support, yet they lose a sense of freedom. Financial help is not always freely given. It often includes conditions, both spoken and unspoken, that expect the young adult to follow the parents' wishes in important life decisions such as what to study, where to work, or how to plan the future.

For example, imagine a young woman who wants to study art history for her master's degree. Her parents, worried about her job prospects and reputation, threaten to stop paying for her tuition unless she switches to accounting or engineering, which they see as safer and more respectable. In this case, her freedom to choose is not real. Her choices are limited by the fact that financial support depends on agreement with her parents' preferences.

This kind of situation is common in societies that value family duty and collective reputation, such as

those influenced by Confucian ideas. In these cultures, children are often expected to choose careers that bring pride, stability, or status to the family. Jobs in business, technology, or government are seen as responsible and honorable, while creative or less traditional paths—like acting, writing, or art—are often viewed as risky or selfish, even when the child has strong talent or motivation. Financial dependence also extends beyond career choices. Parents who pay for living expenses may expect to be consulted about other important decisions. They may want to have a say in whether their children move to another city, study abroad, or buy a house. While parents may describe this involvement as caring or offering wisdom, it often acts as a quiet form of control. Their advice can feel more like authority than support, leaving little space for independent judgment.

These pressures rarely lead to open fights. More often, they are internalized. Many young adults begin to limit themselves before conflict even happens. They avoid discussing certain ideas or dreams, not because they have changed their minds, but because they want to avoid upsetting their parents or losing financial help. This silent self-censorship builds inner tension over time. It may cause them to question their decisions, delay personal goals, or lose confidence in their ability to make independent choices.

Studies also show that conditional support can harm emotional well-being. In a study involving young adults from several countries, researchers found that those who felt their parents had strong control over their life decisions reported lower happiness and higher emotional confusion. The effect was especially strong for those who were still financially dependent on their parents.

### **4.3 Negotiation of Social Relationships and External Roles**

Another main source of control and tension in co-residing families comes from issues of social autonomy. This refers to a young adult's ability to form and manage friendships, romantic relationships, and social roles without parental

control. These areas may seem private, but they are often closely linked with family values, traditions, and social image—especially in cultures where the family's reputation is tied to each member's behavior.

In many families where parents and adult children live together, parents often take part in the young adult's social life in different ways. Sometimes they use direct control, and sometimes they use subtle emotional pressure. Direct control includes open disapproval of certain friends or partners because of class, background, gender, or lifestyle. For example, a son's same-sex partner or a daughter's boyfriend from another city may be seen as a problem for the family's image. Parents may say they are only worried about their child's "future" or "happiness," but their actions often serve to reinforce family boundaries and expectations.

Indirect control can be more hidden but just as powerful. It often appears through repeated questions, small comments, or changes in mood. A parent might ask, "Are you still seeing that friend?" not to show care, but to express quiet disapproval. They may use silence, sarcasm, or cold behavior to make their child feel guilty. These emotional signals train young adults to think carefully before doing anything that might upset their parents. As a result, they begin to predict emotional costs for making independent choices.

In cultures that value family unity over individual freedom, such as many East Asian societies, these patterns are even stronger. A child's actions are often seen as representing the entire family. When a young person makes a choice that goes against tradition, it can feel like breaking loyalty, not just rules. The idea of bringing shame or disappointment to one's family can make it very difficult to act freely in relationships or friendships.

Because of these pressures, many young adults choose to show surface obedience while hiding parts of their real lives. A daughter might tell her parents she is not dating, while secretly maintaining a relationship. A son might hide his dream of becoming a musician and instead tell his parents he is preparing for a more traditional career. These

behaviors keep peace in the home, but they also create inner conflict. The young adult learns to live with two versions of themselves—one that pleases the parents, and one that expresses their real identity.

This kind of double life can cause long-term stress and emotional fatigue. Research on young people living with their parents in large East Asian cities shows that many of them feel anxious when switching between their “public self” at home and their “private self” among friends or partners. They often describe feeling divided, as if they have to perform different roles depending on who is watching.

These divided identities slowly weaken both independence and closeness. The constant fear of upsetting parents or being rejected makes honest communication difficult. Over time, emotional distance grows between parent and child, even though they share the same home. The household becomes a space of quiet separation rather than real connection.

### 5. Adaptive Strategies Among Young Adults

When young adults live with controlling parents, they are not simply passive. They use many different ways, some deliberate and others automatic—to handle the emotional pressure between family expectations and their own need for independence. These strategies reflect how they try to balance family control and personal freedom, while also showing the wider social, cultural, and emotional forces that shape family life.

One common approach is selective compliance. This means that young adults follow certain visible rules, such as eating meals with the family or coming home at a set time, but keep independence in areas that parents cannot easily see. They may express themselves freely online, make private decisions, or keep emotional boundaries while still appearing obedient. This method helps them maintain peace at home, especially in cultures where arguing with parents is considered rude or shameful. However, it can also create inner conflict. They may feel torn between what they believe and what they show.

Over time, this tension can slow down identity growth, as they learn to perform obedience instead of living by their own values.

Another common strategy is emotional distancing. In this pattern, young adults avoid deep or emotional conversations with their parents. For example, a son might not talk about his relationship or job struggles—not because he does not trust his parents, but because he wants to avoid judgment, pressure, or emotional guilt. Keeping such distance helps him feel safer and more in control, yet it also reduces intimacy. Over time, family bonds may weaken, and conversations may become formal or limited to practical matters.

Some young adults use a more direct method: setting boundaries through discussion. Those with higher education or more exposure to individualist values may try to define clear limits within the family. They may ask for privacy, personal space, or respect for their own choices. For instance, a daughter might tell her parents that her room should remain private, or that her career and relationships are her own decisions. This kind of negotiation can lead to healthier relationships when handled well. But it also carries risks. In families where hierarchy and emotional closeness are strong, parents may see such requests as disrespect or rejection. This can cause tension, arguments, or emotional withdrawal.

Many young adults also look for external sources of independence to balance family pressure. They often build close friendships, join online communities, or take part in school or volunteer activities that give them emotional space. For students, dorm life or group projects can provide a sense of control they do not have at home. Part-time jobs also offer a kind of freedom. Earning even a small income helps young people feel capable and gives them more say in family matters. Work can become both a symbol and a tool of independence.

Another strategy is future-oriented detachment. In this case, young adults accept that they cannot change their current situation but focus on preparing for future independence. They might save money, apply for jobs in other cities, or plan to move

out once they reach a certain point in their career. This way of thinking allows them to cope with limited control in the present by holding on to future goals. It reflects the reality that moving out is often difficult because of high housing costs or cultural expectations about family duty.

However, not all responses lead to healthy outcomes. Some young adults internalize parental control so deeply that they lose confidence in their ability to make choices. They may develop learned helplessness, showing low motivation, fear of failure, or strong dependence on others. Others go in the opposite direction and show counter-control—resisting through hidden defiance, small acts of rebellion, or sudden emotional withdrawal. These reactions often come from years of unspoken conflict and the lack of safe ways to express disagreement.

The adaptive strategies that young adults choose are shaped by many factors—their cultural background, personality, parental openness, and emotional or financial resources. Each method reflects an effort to protect one's sense of self in an environment that demands obedience and harmony. The forms of resistance or adjustment may differ, but they all show the same struggle to balance respect and independence within complex family systems.

## 6. Broader Developmental and Relational Consequences

When parents continue to use controlling behaviors while living with their adult children, the results are not just short arguments or brief discomfort. The effects last for a long time and can change the way young adults grow, think, and relate to others. Over time, these patterns influence how they see themselves, how they make decisions, and how they set emotional boundaries both inside and outside the family.

From a developmental point of view, long-term exposure to psychological control can weaken the process of forming a stable and independent sense of self. Erikson's theory explains that building identity is one of the most important tasks during the teenage and early adult years. When parents

interrupt this process—by taking control of choices, limiting expression, or giving approval only when expectations are met—young adults may fail to develop a strong identity. They may depend too much on others for direction or approval, and they may feel lost when facing new challenges. Many of them also struggle to choose clear goals and to tolerate uncertainty in adulthood.

Research has shown that when young adults feel controlled by their parents, they often experience higher levels of anxiety, depression, and self-doubt. Emotional independence—the ability to manage feelings and separate them from others' opinions—is especially fragile in families that use guilt or fear to shape behavior. When approval or love depends on obedience, young adults may learn to overplease others and avoid conflict. These habits can continue later in romantic relationships, workplaces, or social interactions, where they may find it hard to assert their needs or express disagreement.

The emotional impact of such control is also clear in family relationships. Some families manage co-residence with mutual understanding and respect, but many struggle with mixed feelings of closeness and frustration. Adult children who depend on parents for housing or money often feel guilty for wanting freedom but ashamed for not achieving it. This creates a kind of emotional split, where outward harmony hides deeper feelings of resentment or fatigue. The family may seem peaceful, but this peace is often maintained by silence rather than genuine connection.

As time goes on, these unresolved struggles between control and autonomy can lead to emotional withdrawal or even distance after separation. When young adults finally gain the chance to move out for work, marriage, or study, they may choose to limit emotional contact. This distance is not always caused by anger. It often comes from the long-term exhaustion of trying to balance care and control. For many, reducing contact becomes a quiet way to regain independence and emotional space.

On a larger level, these patterns show a broader problem in family development: the shift from

dependence to equality. Healthy families learn to change over time, turning parent–child control into mutual adult support. Families that cannot make this change often stay stuck. Parents may feel ignored or powerless, while adult children remain connected but emotionally detached. This pattern creates stagnation for both sides, blocking the growth of true interdependence.

Cultural values also play a strong role in shaping these outcomes. In many modern societies, young adults live between two expectations: one that

values personal freedom and another that values loyalty and family duty. When the economy is weak or housing is too expensive, co-residence becomes longer, and these tensions grow. Without open discussion or role adjustment, the home can lose its role as a supportive space and instead become a place that holds back personal growth. The very environment meant to protect young adults can, over time, slow the independence it was supposed to help build.

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# The Macroeconomic Implications on Healthcare Expenditures: Challenges Facing South Asian Countries

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**Abstract:** Rising healthcare costs have become a concern for individuals and governments around the world. Governments try to estimate the balance between the allocation of healthcare costs to improve human health and economic efficiency. The study examined the relationship between public healthcare costs and macroeconomic indicators within South Asian countries. The study used data mainly from the World Bank World Development Indicators for eight South Asian countries from 2000 to 2020. The weighted least squares method and the pool regression were employed in the analysis of the study. The main findings of the study demonstrate that GDP *per capita* and foreign direct investments (FDI) increase public healthcare spending. The inflation and budget deficit showed to be significant determinants regarding healthcare spending, specifically for some of the countries in the pool. Based on the findings, the study recommends that governments jump on policies that improve economic growth and tax revenues, as well as stabilize inflation. These economic policies could increase public healthcare costs because they have a strong relationship with macroeconomic indicators.

**Keywords:** South Asia; healthcare expenditures; pool; weighted least squares; macroeconomics

## 1. Introduction

One of the most important values of each country is human health, which is notably affected by the government's obligations in the field of healthcare (Abuselidze, 2021). As health represents one of the key public concerns, attracting the attention of governments and political actors to enhance health is an unavoidable phenomenon (Lacko et al., 2023). Indeed, rising healthcare costs have become a concern for individuals and governments around

the world. In addition, governments try to estimate the balance between the allocation of healthcare costs to improve human health and economic efficiency. Health policymakers and planners in developed and developing countries are worried about growing healthcare expenditures and are interested in determining the key factors that influence this spending (Awais et al., 2021). Therefore, governments are making efforts to increase public healthcare spending with the main

goal of improving the health of the population (Zhou et al., 2020). Improving population health is a subject matter of great concern globally (Zhou et al., 2021). Accordingly, nowadays, people are even more aware of the importance of the healthcare sector, whose weaknesses were manifested by the COVID-19 pandemic. The experience with the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic and the challenges of the rapid population aging showed that nations need strong and flexible health systems. In recent decades, the health expenditures in the countries increased mightily, not just in absolute numbers but also as proportions of their GDPs (Chen et al., 2021). Such an increase in health expenditure all over the world is expected to continue over the coming years (Chen et al., 2021; Tur-Sinai 2022). The healthcare systems in high-income countries are distinguished by a large sum of funds allocated to public health financing, except in the US and several other countries, where private health financing exceeds public health financing (Sirag et al., 2017). Each year, the cost of health by the government is increasing in developed countries. In these countries, the health system is based on the principle of public solidarity and most of healthcare costs are covered by the government through health programs or social insurance schemes (Abuselidze, 2021). In emerging economies, the health system is challenged with unstable health costs like gaps in quality, protection, access, and fairness (Zhou et al., 2021). Consequently, Akca et al. (2017) claimed that the process of establishing the exact healthcare expenditures in a country is a process that needs consideration of several factors.

The importance of the role of healthcare financing stems from the idea that health is vital for human well-being as well as economic development as it ensures a healthy and productive workforce for the economy (Sirag et al., 2017; Nghiem & Connelly 2017; Bloom et al., 2022). It is an obvious fact that improving human health can contribute to economic growth, thereby improving the well-being of the population and economic efficiency (Hussain et al., 2022). The most important development

matter in question facing the world nowadays is healthcare financing (Zeufack-Nkemgha et al., 2020). Therefore, if a country is spending vast amounts of funds on healthcare, it is an investment whose outcome is often worthwhile (e.g. longer life or more gained years of life), (Zeufack-Nkemgha et al., 2020). Improved population health as reflected in morbidity and mortality rates and life expectancy improves labor supply, labor productivity, and total factor productivity (Kabajulizi et al., 2017). Thus, there is no doubt that healthier people work harder, longer and more productively and are probably more abundant consumers. Healthcare systems have also important macroeconomic implications, an aspect that includes feedback effects on public revenues and expenditures (Darvas et al., 2018). Darvas et al. (2018) emphasize that it is of great significance to note that healthcare systems in different countries are organized differently. Thus, in terms of GDP and population, different countries spend very different amounts on health care. Across the countries, the higher the GDP, the higher the government's shares of health care funding. Even though in many countries healthcare costs have been rising for decades, there have been attempts to reduce costs, especially in times of public finance restrictions (Jagrič et al., 2022).

The study investigates the changes in macroeconomic indicators and their effect on public healthcare expenditure in South Asia using the pool model. Besides the Sub-Saharan region, South Asia also is one of the regions with the lowest annual healthcare costs per capita in the world. This is my motivation why studying this region. Therefore, this paper aims are to explore how macroeconomic indicators of healthcare can contribute to understanding the changes in healthcare costs and thus to develop a research framework to illustrate the relationships between macroeconomic indicators, health and health care. With the building of this research framework, the research work will contribute to considering the overall healthcare costs generated by the modern healthcare systems. The following sections of the research work are organized as follows: Section 2 provides a literature

review with a subsection on trends in health expenditures in South Asian countries; Section 3 presents the methodology, data and specification of the model; Section 4 provides empirical results; Section 5 discusses the findings, and Section 6 concludes the study accompanied by implications for policy.

## 2. Literature Review

A lot of research studies provide evidence of investigation on macroeconomic aspects, public health, and healthcare costs. This Section describes the previous research works related to macroeconomic tendencies and changes in healthcare expenditures that refer to public health and which have meaningful research contributions to the existing literature. A substantial literature analyzes the factors of health care expenditures. Given concerns about the cost impact of aging societies, many papers also have focused on per capita healthcare spending increasing levels with age (Hsiao & Heller, 2007). As discussed by Hsiao and Heller (2007), in the most advanced economies, the population between the ages 65 and 74 typically spends three times more on healthcare than those aged 18-64. This ratio grows four times for the 75-84 age groups. As the population of a country ages, pay-as-you-go (PAYG) methods of publicly financing healthcare will impose an increasing tax burden on the working population. Thus, this burden would influence both the labor market and the national savings rate. An interesting finding on the relationship between age and health expenditures was indicated by Sagarik (2016) postulating that the price of health rises with age. Consequently, the empirical evidence pointed out that an increase in age at the same time decreases health and increases health expenditures. Herewith, Jones (2019) emphasizes that much of the discussion about costs of health and social care budget allocations revolves around the aging population while the size of the nearness-to-death effect has a peripheral recognition. In this regard, in many countries, it is well-documented that over the past four decades about half of the health and social care

costs over a person's lifetime occur as death approaches, therefore speaking about the nearness to death effect, which is usually the last year of life, regardless of age at death. Therefore, Jones (2019) suggests that a more accurate forecasting of health care costs would come from the models that incorporate both effects, i.e. age-based healthcare spending with the addition of components based on nearness to death.

The average income of a country is widely recognized as a significant driver of healthcare costs, but it is far from the only one (Darvas et al., 2018; Pakdaman, et al., 2019; Magazzino & Mele, 2012). Furthermore, Magazzino and Mele (2012) emphasize that a lot of studies revealed that in a significant part, the variation in healthcare expenditure through the countries and in time could be explained by variations in GDP *per capita* and mostly it was direct causation as well as reverse causation. In their research study, Canbay and Kirca (2022) found a unidirectional causality relationship from GDP *per capita* to total health expenditures in China, Turkey, and South Africa, and Russia. Consequently, the unidirectional causality relationship was determined also from GDP *per capita* to public health expenditures in Russia, Turkey, India, and South Africa. On the other hand, Canbay and Kirca (2022) indicated that some studies found no statistically significant causality relationship between GDP *per capita* and public health expenditures, e.g. in a study in Turkey for the period 1984–1998; in Pakistan for the period 1972–2006; for 15 OECD countries for the period 1990–2006; in G7 countries for the period 1988–2017; in Turkey for the period 2006:Q1 and 2014:Q4 and; in Nigeria for the period 2000–2016. Annual healthcare costs per capita (in terms of purchasing power parity) vary from about \$200 in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (two regions with fairly low GDP per capita), to average healthcare spending in the EU at \$3,753 and up to more than \$9,000 in North America (where GDP per capita is the highest among world regions), (Darvas et al., 2018).

The healthcare sectors have great and positive macroeconomic impacts on the national economy

(e.g., Jagrič et al., 2022) and additional spending on healthcare services stimulates job creation throughout the national economy. Macroeconomic variables which include national income, national expenditures, inflation, employment and unemployment rate, budget deficits, foreign debt, boom and recession, influence the healthcare sector (Pakdaman et al., 2019). A study by Behera and Dash (2019) showed that tax revenue is an important source of health financing in low- and middle-income countries, thus tax revenue showed a positive and statistically significant relationship with public healthcare expenditures. This study empirically confirmed that the gradual change of the health budget depends on the nature of revenue mobilization. In addition, the study found that the rate of change in public health expenditure relative to tax revenue was higher in middle-income countries than in low-income countries. Negative health effects due to increased economic uncertainty could be made less severe to some extent because FDI also enables higher tax revenues and thus government spending on healthcare and social services in the host country (Nagel et al., 2019). According to these authors, FDI could also improve the productivity of domestic providers in the host country's healthcare sector through international spillovers of medical knowledge. A budget deficit is considered a deficit in the country's estimated budget where tax revenue will not be sufficient to pay government expenditures and requires another source of financing (Umeh et al., 2019). Thus, since the budget is the government's primary policy-making instrument, a fiscal imbalance can lead to an adverse impact on public health expenditures in the long run as well. Many studies have shown that both developed and developing countries have run into national debt, increased public borrowing interest costs, and increased bond yields as a result of government budget deficit policies (Umeh et al., 2019). An examination of the impact of the economic crisis on healthcare costs in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean countries found that being unemployed and spending out-of-pocket was negatively correlated with healthcare expenditure

per capita so that a 1% increase in unemployment was found to decrease health expenditure per capita by \$138, and a 1% increase spending in out-of-pocket was associated with a \$12 reduction in per capita health expenditure (Iheoma, 2022).

## 2.1 Trends in Health Expenditures in South Asian Countries

Figure 1 shows the annual portion of health expenditure as a percentage of GDP in South Asian countries for the period 2000-2020 based on the World Bank database. In general, there is a significant increasing trend only for Afghanistan but only after 2012. For all other seven countries, the trend of annual healthcare expenditures just went up and down throughout the 20 years. The spending on healthcare in Afghanistan and Maldives is quite different than in the other countries. As illustrated in Figure 1, it can be noticed clearly that the Maldives and especially Afghanistan are at the top with their public expenditure higher than 8 percent on average. On the other hand, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are all at the bottom with their health expenditure share of GDP between 2.5 and 4 percent on average during the period 2000–2000. Therefore, Bangladesh and Pakistan are the two countries with the lowest average spending as a percent of GDP (2.57 % of GDP), then India with average spending on healthcare of 3.5% of GDP, follows by Bhutan and Sri Lanka with average spending of 3.90 % of GDP and Nepal with an average spending on healthcare with 4.30% of GDP. Figure 2 presents the health expenditures (HCE) per capita in PPP Int. \$. It is easy to see that the per capita healthcare expenditures in the PPP of Maldives are significantly higher than those of all other countries (1192.8 \$ on average) and the lowest per capita healthcare expenditures on average during 2000-2020 are recorded for Bangladesh (72.6 \$), Pakistan (104.9 \$) and Nepal (111.1 \$). Additionally, the trend of all independent variables can be observed as well (See Appendix).

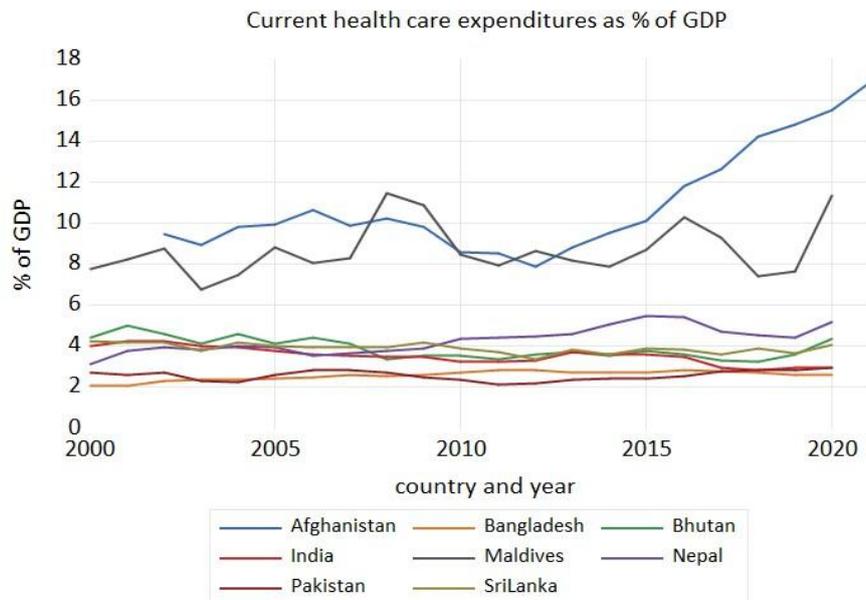


Figure 1. Current health expenditures (HCE) as percentage of GDP in South Asian countries

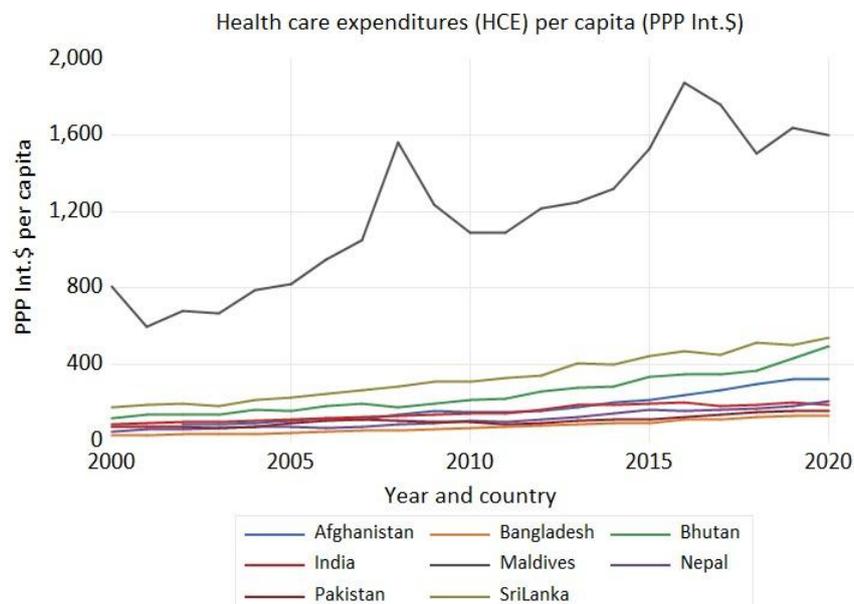


Figure 2. Health expenditures (HCE) per capita (PPP Int. \$) in South Asian countries

### 3. Data and Methods

The dataset utilized in the study is extracted mainly from the World Development Indicators (WDI) of the World Bank Database, (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator>), (World Bank, 2023). Besides, to fill the gap of some missing data regarding tax revenue for Afghanistan (2004-2005, 2018-2020); India (2019-2020); Pakistan (2000-2020); and Bangladesh (2000); were retrieved from United Nations University World Institute for Development from the GRD – Government Revenue

Dataset, (<https://www5.wider.unu.edu>), (UNU, 2023). In addition, the data for all countries regarding budget deficit as well as for the tax revenue for Maldives during 2005-2020 came from the International Macroeconomic Data of CountryEconomy database, (<https://countryeconomy.com>), (IMD, 2023). Furthermore, data for the inflation consumer price index for Afghanistan only for 2003-2004, and 2020 have been extracted from the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, FRED economic data, (<https://countryeconomy.com>), (FRED, 2023).

Empirically, this study provides time series annual data and cross-sectional evidence for South Asian countries. Therefore, the study countries include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Thus, the empirical analysis covers pooled data from eight South Asian countries from 2000 to 2020 based on the availability of data.

This study applied the pooled model. The data for all eight countries were pooled in one combined regression. With pool characteristics, multiple series were analyzed for the same variable, for eight South Asian countries. Data were pooled in a regression with common coefficients for all countries. The fixed effects have also been estimated. In contrast to a pool model, where only the parameters of one equation are estimated, the system estimation, estimates the parameters of two or more equations. There is a long list of estimation methods that can be applied to the system. In our case, the system estimates the results with the weighted least squares method. A version of least squares that assigns weights to each observation is conveniently named weighted least squares or WLS (Startz, 2019). One reason for weighting is to make the subpopulation proportions in the sample imitate the subpopulation proportions in the overall population. Another reason for weighting is to reduce the weight of high error variance observations. Therefore, in this way, individual cross-sectional coefficients for any variable can be estimated as well. The weighted least squares method is presented by eq. (1), (IHS Global, 2020):

$$b_{WLS} = (X' \hat{V}^{-1} X)^{-1} X' \hat{V}^{-1} y \tag{1}$$

where  $\hat{V} = \text{diag}(s_{11}, \dots, s_{22}, \dots, s_{MM}) \otimes I_T$  is a consistent criterion of  $V$ , and  $s_{ii}$  represents the residual variance estimator:

$$s_{ij} = (y_i - X_i b_{LS})'(y_j - X_j b_{LS}) / \max(T_i, T_j) \tag{2}$$

In eq. (2),  $i$  and  $j$  are the non-missing common elements. The maximum function of the eq. (2) is created to manage the case of unbalanced data by down-weighting the covariance terms which leads to a consistent estimator of the variance components. When an estimation is specified, there

are two choices of which coefficients to use in computing the  $s_{ij}$ . If the choice of not to iterate the weights is used, the OLS coefficient estimates will be used to estimate the variances. If the choice to iterate the weights is used, then the current parameter estimates are used in computing the  $s_{ij}$ . Whereby, these estimates may be based on the previously computed weights. This final procedure may be repeated until the coefficients and weights converge. The estimator for the coefficient variance matrix is given in eq. (3), (IHS Global, 2020):

$$\text{var}(b_{WLS}) = (X' \hat{V}^{-1} X)^{-1} \tag{3}$$

Assuming heteroskedasticity but no serial or contemporaneous correlation in the residuals, the weighted least squares method is efficient and the variance estimator is consistent. Thus, one of the approaches to handling with heteroscedasticity is to weight the observations so that the weighted data are homoscedastic (Startz, 2019). It is worth noting that if there are no cross-equation restrictions on the model parameters, the system-wide weighted LS yields estimates that are identical to those obtained by equation-by-equation LS.

#### 4. Results

The pool model in Table 1 contains annual data on healthcare expenditures per capita, purchasing power parity (PPP) Int.\$ (HCEPPP) and GDP *per capita*-constant 2015 US\$ (GDPPC2015), Inflation consumer prices index, annual % (INFLATIONCP), Foreign direct investments (FDI) as % of GDP (FDIGDP), Tax revenue, % of GDP (TAXREVENUE), Budget deficit as % of GDP (BUDGETDEFICIT), Labor force participation rate, total, % of population ages 15+ (LFP) relative to the South Asian countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The idea to use the pool was to study changes common to all countries. Pool series do not have any special features or any particular restrictions. To enable a different variance for each country, a cross-section weight was chosen. The cross-sectional specific constant captures all the things that make one country different from another but that are not included in the model. Such

differences are known as country-specific constants. Country-specific constants are called fixed effects (Startz, 2019).

**Table 1.** Pool regression results

Dependent variable: log (HCEPPP)

Method: Pooled EGLS (Cross-section weights)\*

Variable	Coefficient	Std.Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	1.4818	0.1860	7.9663	0.0000
Log(FDIGDP)	0.9863	0.1266	7.7871	0.0000
Dlog(INFLATIONCP)	0.0315	0.3055	0.1030	0.9181
Log(GDPPC2015)	0.9947	0.0635	15.660	0.0000
D(LFP)	0.0004	0.0031	0.1538	0.8780
D(BUDGETDEFICIT)	-0.0072	0.0220	-0.3263	0.7447
D(TAXREVENUE)	0.0147	0.0108	1.3540	0.1779
Fixed effects (Crossed)				
AFGHANISTAN_C	-0.6051			
BANGLADESH_C	-0.2244			
BHUTAN_C	0.2759			
INDIA_C	-0.1150			
MALDIVES_C	0.8363			
NEPAL_C	-0.7525			
PAKISTAN_C	0.0293			
SRILANKA_C	0.4924			
Effects specifications				
Cross-section fixed (dummy variables)				
Weighted statistics				
R-squared	0.9656	Mean dependend var	7.4647	
Adjusted R-squared	0.9625	S.D. dependent var	3.6684	
S.E.of regression	0.2813	Sum squared resid	11.158	
F-statistic	304.79	Durbin-Watson stat	0.4445	
Prob(F-statistic)	0.0000			
Unweighted statistics				
R-squared	0.9061	Mean dependend var	5.2469	
Sum squared resid	12.078	Durbin-Watson stat	0.1998	

\*Linear estimation after one-step weighting matrix. Cross-sections included: 8.

Sample: 2000-2020. Included observations: 20 after adjustment. Total pool (unbalanced) observations: 155.

Source: Author's calculations.

Bai and Ng's (2004) PANIC (Panel Analysis of Nonstationarity in Idiosyncratic and Common Components) test is considered the first unit root test for panel data with cross-sectional dependence. The assumption of cross-sectional independence

may be a difficult task to be justified because the cross-sections are often influenced by common forces, called factors. Tests that include cross-sectional dependence are called second-generation panel unit root tests (Ahn & Horenstein, 2013). The

algorithm for computing the PANIC unit root test includes three parts: computing the factor and idiosyncratic components, testing for a unit root in the idiosyncratic components, and testing for a unit root in the common factors (Bai & Ng, 2004; Ahn & Horenstein, 2013). Therefore, The PANIC test is based on a factor model in which non-stationarity may emerge from common factors, idiosyncratic components, or both. Thus, second-generation panel unit root tests with cross-sectional dependence of Panel Analysis of Nonstationarity in Idiosyncratic and Common Components (PANIC) based on Bai and Ng (2004) were performed in our panel group with multiple series. The test selected 7 common factors. The PANIC test fails to reject the null hypothesis that the common factors are non-stationary. The final output of the pooled version of the PANIC test also fails to reject the null hypothesis that all cross-sections are not co-integrated.

The fixed effect estimation was set up in an intercept for each country. The intercept is presented in two parts. The "C" shows the average intercept value for all countries in the pool. The "C" labeled for individual countries provides the country's intercept as a deviation from that whole average. Thus, in our results in Table 1, the whole average intercept is 1.48, and the intercept for Afghanistan is -0.61 (0.61 below 1.48, i.e. 0.87). After the pool estimate specified fixed effects, the Redundant Fixed Effects Test was used to test for country-specific intercepts against a common (average) intercept. According to the value of the F test (215.63) and (7,141) degrees of freedom the hypothesis of a

common intercept is widely rejected. This means that the different country-specific intercepts are more significant for each of the countries in the pool than the common (average) intercept. The residuals should be centered at zero. Figure 3 shows that the residuals for each of the countries are not quite centered on zero, whereby the residuals for some countries are mostly positive and other country's residuals are nearly negative. It is an indication that the country equations should have different intercepts.

The results of the pool regression in Table 1 show that only two coefficients are statistically significant at a 1% level of significance. The GDPPC2015 and FDIGDP have both positive effects on the changes in the dependent variable (HCEPPP). However, the F test confirms the joint significance of variables that are included in the pool. Namely, with the increase in GDP *per capita* and foreign direct investments in the mentioned countries, there is an increase in per capita health expenditures in the same countries. Further, the causality results may be explained as well. The study investigated the direction of causality employing Pairwise Granger Causality Tests with two lags. The number of lags has been selected using the Akaike Information criterion as well as the final Prediction Error criterion. The results indicate only the two-way directional causality that goes from GDPPC2015 to HCEPPP and *vice versa* at a 1% level. A one-way directional causality from HCEPPP to LFP, FDIGDP, BUDGETDEFICIT, and to INFLATIONCP was found at 5% level.



Figure 3. Country's residuals

Source: Author's design.

Furthermore, Table 2-3 provides the results of system estimation. As mentioned before, the Weighted Least Squares method was chosen to produce estimates for the eight equations, i.e. for each country. From the individual results for each country's coefficients separately within the system estimation (Table 2-3), a statistically significant positive effect of the FDIGDP on the HCEPPP can be noticed for Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, and Pakistan. A positive and statistically significant effect of GDPFC2015 on HCEPPP is noticeable for Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal,

Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The negative statistically significant effect on the HCEPPP is coming from the impact of INFLATIONCP in Bhutan and Nepal. Interestingly, a negative and statistically significant effect of BUDGETDEFICIT on HCEPPP was noticed for India but positive for the Maldives. In addition, Table 4-6 presents R-squared results from weighted least squares estimation for each of the countries. If look at Tables 3–5 it can be noticed that the highest R-squared is Nepal (0.97). The lowest coefficient of R-squared was observed for Sri Lanka (0.60).

Table 2. Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression results

System estimation method: Weighted Least Squares				
Country's variables	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
Afghanistan_Intercept (C1)	1.1314	0.5854	1.9326	0.0561

Afghanistan_FDIGDP (C2)	0.9604	0.2440	3.9357	0.0002
Afghanistan_INFLATIONCP (C3)	-0.8642	0.8120	-1.0643	0.2898
Afghanistan_GDPPC2015 (C4)	0.9048	0.1538	5.8809	0.0000
Afghanistan_LFP (C5)	0.0019	0.0043	0.4373	0.6628
Afghanistan_BUDGETDEFICIT (C6)	-0.0455	0.0365	-1.2450	0.2161
Afghanistan_TAXREVENUE (C7)	0.0527	0.0519	1.0166	0.3118
Bangladesh_Intercept (C8)	0.1380	1.3631	0.1012	0.9196
Bangladesh_FDIGDP (C9)	5.2781	1.1783	4.4792	0.0000
Bangladesh_INFLATIONCP (C10)	-1.8089	6.6372	-0.2725	0.7858
Bangladesh_GDPPC2015 (C11)	-0.4336	0.9266	-0.4679	0.6408
Bangladesh_LFP (C12)	-0.0225	0.0318	-0.7076	0.4809
Bangladesh_BUDGETDEFICIT (C13)	0.0691	0.1061	0.6517	0.5161
Bangladesh_TAXREVENUE (C14)	-0.1261	0.1800	-0.7005	0.4852
Bhutan_Intercept (C15)	4.1645	1.7712	2.3512	0.0207
Bhutan_FDIGDP (C16)	-0.6493	0.7871	-0.8250	0.4114
Bhutan_INFLATIONCP (C17)	-3.6472	1.4735	-2.4751	0.0150
Bhutan_GDPPC2015 (C18)	0.9830	0.3390	2.8994	0.0046
Bhutan_LFP (C19)	0.0273	0.0313	0.8722	0.3852
Bhutan_BUDGETDEFICIT (C20)	0.0904	0.0720	1.2549	0.2125
Bhutan_TAXREVENUE (C21)	0.0567	0.0305	1.8558	0.0664
India_Intercept (C22)	2.7859	1.5094	1.8456	0.0679
India_FDIGDP (C23)	-0.4617	0.5062	-0.9122	0.3639
India_INFLATIONCP (C24)	2.3487	1.4401	1.6309	0.1061
India_GDPPC2015 (C25)	1.0957	0.3792	2.8892	0.0047
India_LFP (C26)	-0.0304	0.0230	-1.3221	0.1892
India_BUDGETDEFICIT (C27)	-0.1394	0.0635	-2.1941	0.0306
India_TAXREVENUE (C28)	-0.0304	0.0583	-0.5212	0.6034

Source: Author's calculations.

**Table 3.** Weighted Least squares (WLS) regression results: continues

System estimation method: Weighted Least Squares-continues				
Country's variables	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
Maldives_Intercept (C29)	1.7740	0.5386	3.2937	0.0014
Maldives_FDIGDP (C30)	1.5493	0.2358	6.5717	0.0000
Maldives_INFLATIONCP (C31)	0.1711	0.3401	0.5029	0.6161
Maldives_GDPPC2015 (C32)	0.7301	0.1006	7.2591	0.0000
Maldives_LFP (C33)	-0.0062	0.0079	-0.7840	0.4349
Maldives_BUDGETDEFICIT (C34)	0.0728	0.0336	2.1631	0.0329
Maldives_TAXREVENUE (C35)	0.0149	0.0093	1.5967	0.1135
Nepal_Intercept (C36)	0.6905	0.1713	4.0298	0.0001
Nepal_FDIGDP (C37)	0.7613	0.1946	3.9129	0.0002
Nepal_INFLATIONCP (C38)	-1.4158	0.6603	-2.1442	0.0345
Nepal_GDPPC2015 (C39)	1.1586	0.0931	12.437	0.0000
Nepal_LFP (C40)	-0.0044	0.0070	-0.6242	0.5340

Nepal_BUDGETDEFICIT (C41)	-0.1230	0.0893	-1.3773	0.1715
Nepal_TAXREVENUE (C42)	-0.0599	0.0620	-0.9653	0.3367
Pakistan_ Intercept (C43)	1.1033	0.5903	1.8691	0.0646
Pakistan_FDIGDP (C44)	1.4580	0.4093	3.5622	0.0006
Pakistan_INFLATIONCP (C45)	0.2772	1.7861	0.1552	0.8770
Pakistan_GDPPC2015 (C46)	0.9773	0.2717	3.5971	0.0005
Pakistan_LFP (C47)	0.0014	0.0084	0.1681	0.8668
Pakistan_BUDGETDEFICIT (C48)	-0.0144	0.0606	-0.2387	0.8118
Pakistan_TAXREVENUE (C49)	-0.0769	0.0691	-1.1131	0.2684
SriLanka_ Intercept (C50)	11.148	1.4307	7.7941	0.0000
SriLanka_FDIGDP (C51)	-1.5006	1.4031	-1.0695	0.2874
SriLanka_INFLATIONCP (C52)	-2.2585	2.3841	-0.9473	0.3458
SriLanka_GDPPC2015 (C53)	-1.3160	0.4577	-2.8750	0.0049
SriLanka_LFP (C54)	-0.0058	0.0097	-0.6009	0.5493
SriLanka_BUDGETDEFICIT (C55)	0.0056	0.0768	0.0735	0.9415
SriLanka_TAXREVENUE (C56)	0.0399	0.1649	0.2416	0.8096

Source: Author's calculations.

**Table 4.** R-squared results from Weighted least squares: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Bhutan

Equation: Afghanistan			
R-squared	0.85	Mean dependent var	5.17
Adjusted R-squared	0.76	S.D. dependent var	0.39
S.E. of regression	0.19	Sum squared resid	0.37
Durbin-Watson stat	1.28		
Equation: Bangladesh			
Observations: 25			
R-squared	0.71	Mean dependent var	4.21
Adjusted R-squared	0.58	S.D. dependent var	0.48
S.E. of regression	0.31	Sum squared resid	1.26
Durbin-Watson stat	0.51		
Equation: Bhutan			
Observations: 25			
R-squared	0.72	Mean dependent var	5.51
Adjusted R-squared	0.56	S.D. dependent var	0.38
S.E. of regression	0.25	Sum squared resid	0.69
Durbin-Watson stat			

Source: Author's calculations.

**Table 5.** R-squared results from Weighted least squares: India, Maldives, and Nepal

Equation: India			
Observations: 25			
R-squared	0.72	Mean dependent var	4.98
Adjusted R-squared	0.58	S.D. dependent var	0.26

S.E. of regression	0.17	Sum squared resid	0.38
Durbin-Watson stat	1.16		
Equation: Maldives			
Observations: 25			
R-squared	0.88	Mean dependent var	7.05
Adjusted R-squared	0.82	S.D.dependent var	0.34
S.E. of regression	0.14	Sum squared resid	0.26
Durbin-Watson stat	1.13		
Equation: Nepal			
Observations: 25			
R-squared	0.97	Mean dependent var	4.66
Adjusted R-squared	0.96	S.D. dependent var	0.40
S.E. of regression	0.08	Sum squared resid	0.08
Durbin-Watson stat	1.36		

Source: Author’s calculations.

**Table 6.** R-squared results from Weighted least squares: Pakistan and SriLanka

Equation: Pakistan			
Observations: 25			
R-squared	0.68	Mean dependent var	4.64
Adjusted R-squared	0.53	S.D. dependent var	0.25
S.E. of regression	0.17	Sum squared resid	0.38
Durbin-Watson stat	0.59		
Equation: SriLanka			
Observations: 25			
R-squared	0.60	Mean dependent var	5.77
Adjusted R-squared	0.42	S.D.dependent var	0.36
S.E. of regression	0.27	Sum squared resid	0.95
Durbin-Watson stat	0.77		

Source: Author’s calculation.

### 5. Discussion

From the pool results, it seems evident that healthcare expenditures in South Asian countries are influenced jointly, directly or indirectly, by all macroeconomic indicators included in the pool. However, the most statistically significant positive effect on HCEPPP was evident directly from GDPPC2015 and FDIGDP. This means that the macroeconomic indicators do not only affect the economic growth of the South Asian countries but also the healthcare sector including the healthcare costs. Hence, an increase in GDP *per capita* indicates

an improvement in the economic growth of a country and accordingly governments can accumulate enough tax revenue to increase their revenue base (Zhou et al., 2020). Therefore, this allows countries to increase the budgets for their health systems by increasing healthcare spending. However, the results of this study pointed out that GDP *per capita* is the most significant determining factor of healthcare expenditure in South Asian countries. Undoubtedly, our findings also confirm that a country’s GDP *per capita* is a significant driver of healthcare spending (Darvas et al., 2018; Pakdaman, et al., 2019; Magazzino & Mele, 2012)

and very often in direct causality as well as reverse causality with the healthcare costs.

While FDIGDP showed a direct impact on HCEPPP within the pool, FDIGDP was a particularly important indicator for some of the countries as well. Thus, from the findings, it can be understood that public health spending increases as foreign direct investment (FDI) increases in some of the countries, such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, and Pakistan. The reason for this is that foreign investors could help boost physical capacity in the healthcare sector, by increasing financial aid for diagnostic facilities, the number of hospital beds and increasing the supply of specialists (Zhou et al., 2020). Additionally, FDI could make use of modernized health resources and technology to higher standards as part of their corporate social responsibility. This occurs in many developing countries where multinational corporations have built fully equipped healthcare facilities. Moreover, the effect of FDI will increase individual incomes including government income. This could increase the revenue base of the government and thus the resources allocated to the health sector are likely to increase as well.

Furthermore, the results indicate that HCEPPP is negatively affected by INFLATIONCPI in Bhutan and Nepal. Therefore, a decreasing trend between healthcare expenditure and inflation in Bhutan and Nepal exists. Although generally negative inflation on the economy may not be a good thing, this means that effects on healthcare could not increase healthcare costs because prices of goods and services related to health are not increasing. The negative relationship of healthcare costs relating to inflation suggests that in monetary terms the value of healthcare costs is stable or decreasing simply because inflation is not increasing prices but more willingly decreasing prices (Zhou et al., 2020).

Additionally, the present study indicated that BUDGETDEFICIT had a negative effect on HCEPPP in India while BUDGETDEFICIT had a positive effect on HCEPPP in Maldives. The negative impact of BUDGETDEFICIT on HCEPPP in India is likely due to very often reduction in health expenditures

of the government where these government deficits become not sustainable. Additionally, this may imply that budget deficits in India do not support healthcare sector spending. The budget deficits of the government have a positive significant impact on healthcare costs in Maldives probably because more budget allocations are put repeatedly into health government expenditure (Umeh et al., 2021). Generally, it can be assumed that total spending on the healthcare sector increases as countries become richer. Furthermore, this study identified that the national economy in South Asian countries matters and is relevant to the public healthcare expenditures. Thus, in terms of policy implications, the results may provide solid economic policy measures. These economic policy measures include improving economic growth and tax revenues, as well as guarantees for stable inflation. These economic policies could boost public healthcare costs because they have a strong relationship with macroeconomic indicators. As summarized in Pakdaman, et al. (2019), a very important question here is whether increased healthcare spending improves public health.

## 6. Conclusion

The study investigated the effect of macroeconomic indicators on public healthcare costs within South Asian countries. An increase was observed in health expenditure per capita in South Asian countries over the last two decades. Using the weighted least squares method and the pool least squares regression, data for the study was obtained mainly from the World Bank's World Development Indicators for eight South Asian countries, from 2000 to 2020. The empirical results show that an increase in public healthcare expenditures is related to an increase in GDP *per capita* and foreign direct investments (FDI). Furthermore, for some of the countries, budget deficit and inflation were also shown to be specifically significant determinants of healthcare expenditures. According to the results of the study, along with increasing resources, the promotion of economic policy measures directly or

indirectly will enable an improved healthcare system with efficient healthcare spending.

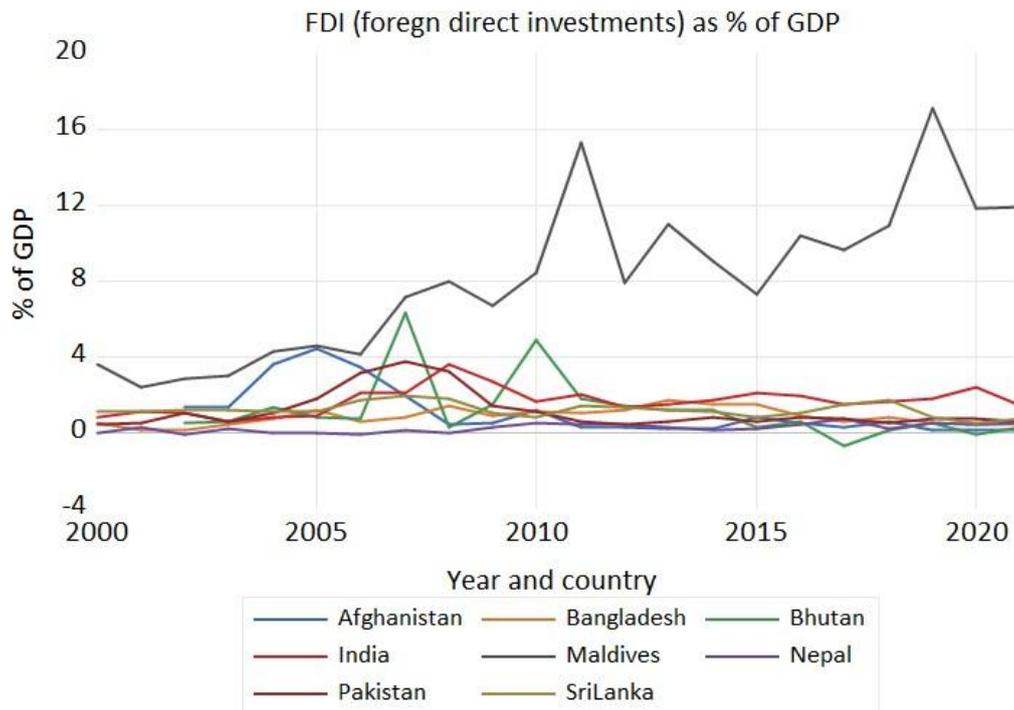
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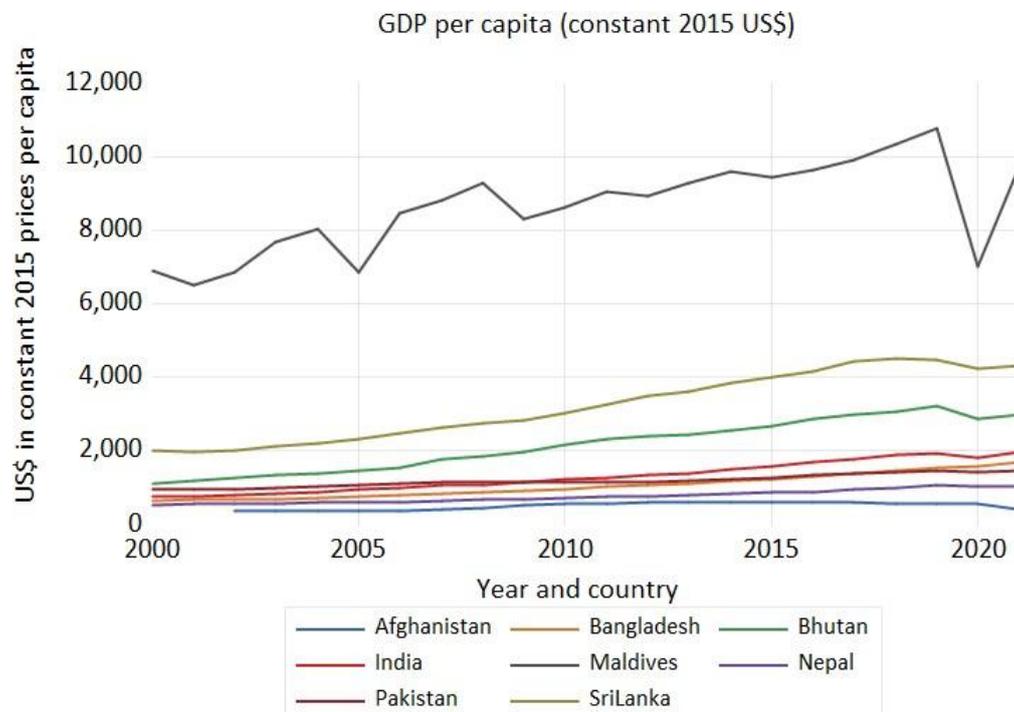
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**Appendix**

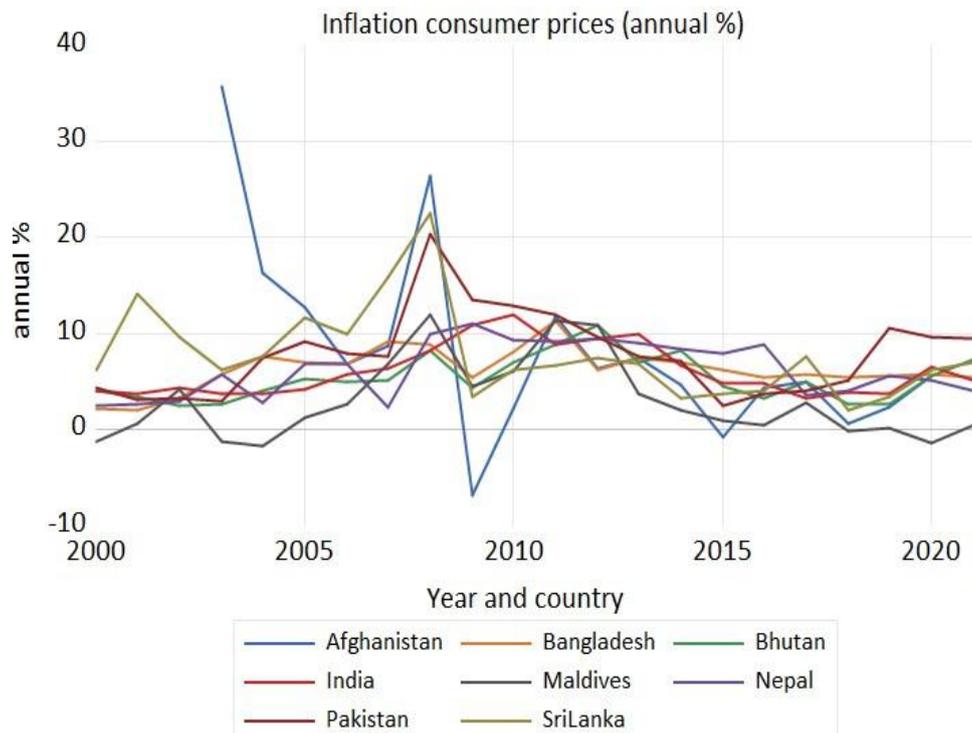
**A: FDI**, Foreign direct investments as % of GDP in South Asia



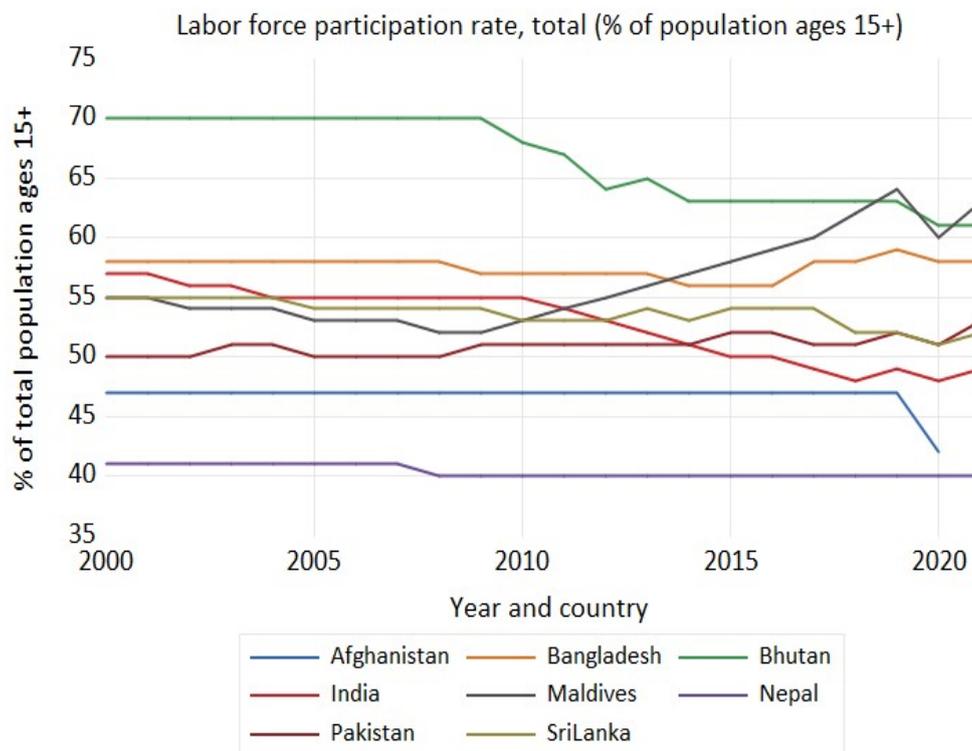
**B: GDPPC2015**, GDP per capita (constant 2015 US \$) in South Asia



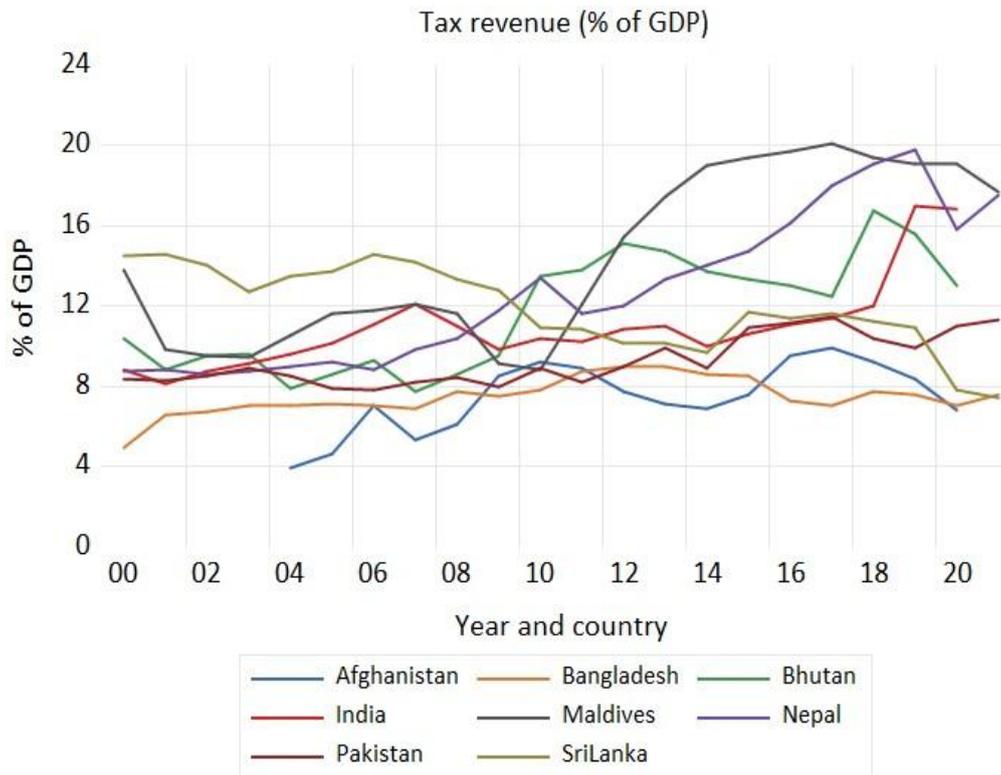
**C: INFLATIONCPI**, Inflation consumer prices (annual %) in South Asia



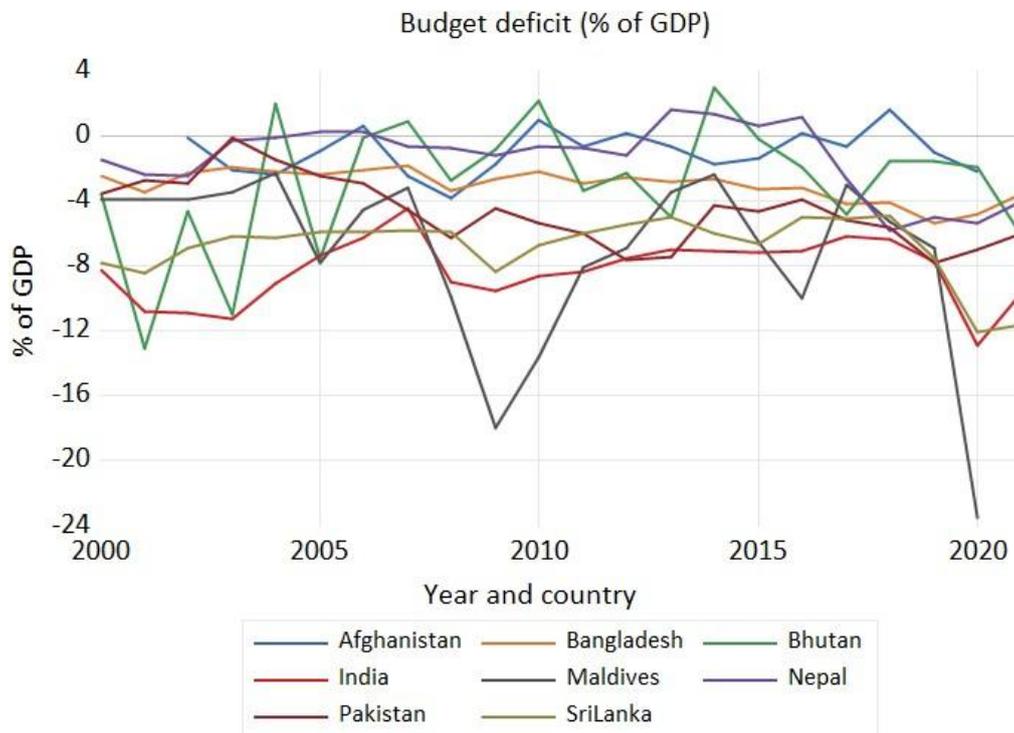
D: LFS, Labor force participation rate, total (% of population ages 15+)



E: TAXREVENUE, Tax revenue (% of GDP) in South Asia



F: BUDGETDEFICIT, Budget deficit (% of GDP) in South Asia



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# Tensions Between Cosmopolitan Curricula and Local Social Expectations in Southeast Asian Private Education

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**Abstract:** The script addresses the historical dispute between global curricula and local sociocultural requirements in private schooling in Southeast Asia. With private and international schools adapting more and more to globally inclined curriculums, such as the International Baccalaureate program and the Cambridge International program, the linguistic character, pedagogical practices, and civic engagement criteria introduced by these curricula often differ from the foundations of the local culture, religion, and language. To understand how these conflicts are manifested in language policies, civic consciousness, and educational equity, this research conducts a thematic analysis using the following frameworks: globalism (Hansen, 2008), postcolonial criticism (Joseph & Matthews, 2014), and Confucian globalism (Choo, 2020). By considering four Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand case studies, it has been argued that private schools cannot be considered a classroom group in joining these global curricula; instead, they are the loci of curriculum negotiation. Private schools thus cannot be assumed to follow global proven norms but take alternative routes. To this end, possible reactions include curriculum integration, stakeholder engagement, and cultural reciprocity. This work belongs to global education research since it is region-based and considers the subject of curriculum globalization via a monistic theoretical background.

**Keywords:** cosmopolitan education; Southeast Asia; private schools; curriculum tensions; global citizenship; Confucian ethics; postcolonial theory; bilingual education

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last 20 years, private education across Southeast Asia, particularly in Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Thailand, has flourished. The middle class seeks more; the economy is increasingly

integrated, and international credentialing is desirable. Growth ensues for these reasons. Yet the region is not homogeneous. Different colonial histories, language policies, and religious traditions color the education systems (Pinar, 2003). For example, Malaysia's dual-language policy,

Thailand's Buddhist-based moral education, and Singapore's bilingual policy impose different social norms that can be discordant with global curricular standards.

The tension is manifested in curriculum design, pedagogy, and citizenship formation, and this essay explores these tensions. It claims the tension is not simply a contradiction but a dynamic negotiation that private schools engage in to either localize global norms, or cosmopolitanize local values. By conceptually dissecting a postcolonial and rapidly globalizing culture, the article adds to the understanding of curriculum tensions and conflict (Byker & Marquardt, 2016), with brief case examples and theoretical frameworks.

## 2. Core Areas of Tension

### 2.1 Cultural and Linguistic Identity

One clear and strongly felt tension in private education in Southeast Asia is language and culture. Global curricula are usually taught in English. They focus on global topics and are shaped by Western education models. This helps students prepare for study and work across borders. But it also pushes local languages and cultural stories to the side.

In places like Singapore, national policy requires schools to balance English with a "Mother Tongue" language. Yet many international schools do not fully follow this rule. As a result, students may become weaker in their heritage languages. At the same time, their connection to local culture can also be broken.

In countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, language is closely linked to national identity and religion. Because of this, using English as the main teaching language can cause discomfort in society. It can also create fear that local culture is being diluted. Many parents and policymakers worry that students in these schools may slowly lose touch with their roots. Over time, this may weaken shared social values.

### 2.2 National vs. Global Citizenship

Global education often promotes ideas like human rights, understanding across cultures, and care for the environment. These ideas support a global way of thinking that goes beyond national borders.

At the same time, many Southeast Asian governments see education as a key way to build national identity. Schools are expected to shape moral behavior and civic responsibility. National curricula often stress history, patriotism, religious or spiritual beliefs, and respect for social order.

When private institutions implement global curricula that minimize or omit these themes, they are perceived as producing citizens who are disengaged from national values and collective memory. For example, in Thailand, the education system is closely linked to royal and Buddhist values. In Vietnam, civic education is based on socialist moral ideas. When international schools ignore these elements, their students may not fit well with wider social values. Because of this, they may face doubt or criticism from the government and from local communities. This tension is not only about teaching methods. It is also political, since it reflects different ideas about what kind of citizen schools should produce.

### 2.3 Socioeconomic Stratification

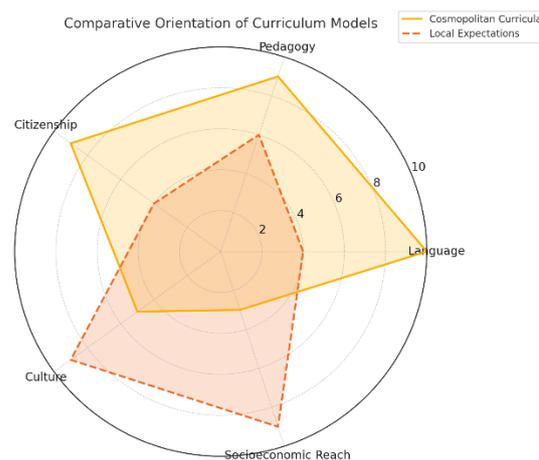
Private international schools that provide global curricula are often too expensive for most people. High tuition fees, selective admission rules, and close ties to elite culture help maintain education advantages for a small group. As a result, these schools serve as engines of social reproduction, enabling wealthy families to secure transnational futures for their children while the majority are funneled through national systems. Because of this, a two-track education system begins to form. This situation can increase social inequality and weaken national goals for equal development (Welch, 2011). At the same time, global schools often stay separate from local school systems. As a result, there is little cooperation or exchange with public schools. Over time, the distance between international and national curricula can create the idea that national

education is of lower quality. This view can reduce trust in public education among students and the wider society. In this way, the growth of global curricula in elite private schools creates both an education gap and a social ranking. In this ranking, “global” education is often seen as better than “local” education.

### 3. Illustrative Frameworks

#### 3.1 Curriculum Value Tensions in Southeast Asian Private Education

To show the different priorities between global curricula and local social expectations, the updated radar chart below presents five main areas of education: language, teaching methods, citizenship, culture, and access by social class. Each area is rated on a scale from 0 to 10. The purpose is not to give exact numbers. It is to show the relative focus of each approach. The two educational models reflect different priorities. Global curricula focus mainly on preparing students for international settings. For this reason, they place strong emphasis on teaching in English, encouraging inquiry-based learning, and developing global citizenship skills. These elements support mobility and cross-border engagement. Local social expectations follow a different logic. Education is seen as a way to preserve shared culture and language. Schools are also expected to serve a broad population rather than a narrow elite. As a result, greater value is placed on cultural transmission, the continued use of local languages, and equal access to education across social groups.



**Figure 1.**

Figure 1 shows that these two approaches are not only about teaching choices. They also reflect different cultural, moral, and political goals. For example, cosmopolitan education assigns maximum emphasis to English fluency (10) and global citizenship (9), privileging transnational competencies and universalist ideals. However, this emphasis comes with low prioritization of socioeconomic inclusivity (3) and heritage culture (5), which are pillars of local educational expectations. Conversely, the local model demonstrates strong emphasis on mother-tongue preservation (score of 9), structured moral education, and civic patriotism—dimensions that are frequently de-emphasized in international programs.

The difference in “Socioeconomic Reach” is very clear. Global curricula mainly serve elite students. These students often prepare for study abroad and global jobs. Local education systems have a wider goal. They aim to support whole communities and keep national unity. Because of this difference, the education gap is not only about ideas. It also has real social effects, since curriculum choices can increase social division.

These different value patterns show a deeper conflict in ways of thinking. Global models focus on the individual and follow liberal and global ideas. Local expectations focus on the group and are shaped by history, society, and religion.

### 3.2 Comparative Characteristics of Competing Curricula

The table below shows a comparison of curriculum features across five main areas. It shows how global and local approaches are based on different ideas about knowledge, identity, and authority.

**Table 1.**

Dimension	Cosmopolitan Curriculum	Local Expectation
Language	Primarily English; global lingua franca	Mother-tongue reinforcement
Pedagogical Style	Inquiry, reflexivity, international case studies	Structured, exam-oriented, moral instruction
Citizenship Focus	Global citizens, rights, diversity ethics	Patriotism, social harmony, local duties
Cultural Content	Global narratives and histories	National history, religious traditions
Assessment Methods	Project-based, formative, reflective writing	Standardized tests (local/national exams)

The table also shows that a curriculum is more than a list of subjects. It reflects social hierarchies, moral beliefs, and language values.

### 4. Case Studies

Vietnam has seen fast growth in international schools. These schools receive little direct control from the state. But their teaching content often differs from national education goals. The Vietnamese government stresses civic education based on socialist moral values. Many international schools do not teach national history, political values, or Vietnamese literature. Because of this gap, concerns arise about how well students connect to society and culture in the long term.

In Singapore, the government strongly supports bilingual education and moral learning. Some students in international schools do not follow the required mother tongue rules. Reports from study tours and teachers show concern among parents and

educators. They feel that local culture, such as Singapore English and non-Western views in humanities subjects, receives too little attention (Soong, 2020; Soong & Caldwell, 2021). This situation creates worry that national identity may weaken as schools seek global status.

Malaysia presents a different situation. The growth of cross-border education has pushed schools to meet global standards and national cultural rules at the same time (Ren, 2024). Research by Hill, Cheong, and Leong (2014) shows that foreign university campuses in Malaysia must change their curricula. These changes help align teaching with Islamic values, Malay customs, and language laws. This process shows ongoing adjustment between global image and local acceptance.

Thailand adds another case. International curricula have spread across the country. At the same time, moral education remains a key part of national policy. The Ministry of Education requires teaching on Buddhist ethics and respect for the monarchy. International schools are not fully exempt from these rules. Yet many give these topics less attention. This leads to public discussion about the cultural duties of private schools.

### 5. Theoretical Insights

The tension between global curricula and local expectations in Southeast Asia can be better understood through several related theories. In education, cosmopolitanism supports openness to different cultures, global citizenship, and critical thinking (Choo, 2017). David Hansen (2008) states that cosmopolitan education should keep local traditions instead of removing them. He argues that students should learn from many traditions and give them new meaning. This view shows that global and local goals do not have to oppose each other.

Postcolonial theory offers another way to understand this issue. Joseph and Matthews (2014) explain that education systems in Southeast Asia are shaped by long histories of colonial rule and nation-building. Many global education models come from the Global North. Because of this, they may repeat

old power structures. This often happens through the strong use of English, Western knowledge systems, and individual-centered values. When this pattern is recognized, it leads to a more critical form of cosmopolitanism. In this form, global learning pays closer attention to history and culture.

Recent studies also discuss Confucian cosmopolitanism, which is especially useful in East and Southeast Asia. Choo (2020) argues that values such as moral self-growth, respect for family, and social balance can exist together with global ethical ideas. This view treats cosmopolitanism as something that can work with local moral traditions. It does not see the two as opposing forces. This idea fits well in places like Singapore and Vietnam, where Confucian traditions exist alongside strong interest in international education.

## 6. Strategic Responses

### 6.1 Hybrid Curriculum Design

Hybrid curriculum design offers a clear way to respond to the tension between global and local expectations. Schools do not need to choose one side. They can combine global skills with local content. These skills include critical thinking, use of more than one language, and learning about sustainability. At the same time, teaching can stay rooted in local culture.

For example, some private schools in Malaysia and the Philippines use bilingual courses. These courses mix Cambridge or IB programs with national language and history classes. This structure helps students gain international skills. At the same time, it helps them stay connected to their social and cultural setting.

### 6.2 Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder involvement is important for making curricula accepted and meaningful. Schools need to work with parents and students. They also need to work with local teachers, government officials, and religious or cultural leaders. This shared process allows schools to adjust teaching content and methods in ways that match local values.

In Thailand, some international schools work with Buddhist teachers. Together, they include mindfulness activities and moral lessons based on national education guidelines. These actions show that community-based planning can exist with international programs. They also help build trust and local support.

### 6.3 Integrated Assessment Approaches

Assessment is one area where global and local systems often differ. Global programs often use projects, reflection, and ongoing feedback. National systems often depend on major exams. Many international schools in Southeast Asia now use both methods.

In Vietnam, some international high schools prepare students for the IB Diploma and the national graduation exam. They do this by offering two assessment paths at the same time. This allows students to apply to universities inside the country and abroad. This method helps schools recognize different types of achievement and meet national rules.

### 6.4 Cultural Reciprocity

Cultural reciprocity means that local knowledge should be clearly valued in global education. Local languages, histories, and moral ideas should be treated as important forms of knowledge. Some schools in Singapore now include regional literature, Southeast Asian ideas, and multilingual identity in humanities classes.

These practices help prevent the loss of local culture in international schools. They also add depth to global learning by bringing in different ways of thinking.

## 7. Conclusion

The tensions discussed in this paper show a deeper struggle over the purpose of education, cultural acceptance, and control over knowledge in private schools in Southeast Asia. As global curricula enter private education in the region, they bring new subjects and teaching styles. At the same time, they challenge existing moral rules, language use, and

ideas about citizenship that shape national identity and community ties.

This paper explains that these tensions should not be seen as simple oppositions. Instead, they exist as changing and negotiated spaces. Through examples and theory, the paper shows how schools deal with

global demands and local responsibilities at the same time. It also shows that global and local values do not cancel each other out. They can work together when schools make careful choices in curriculum design, involve local groups, and respect local culture.

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# Wellness, Discipline, and the Making of the Neoliberal Self

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**Abstract:** This paper examines how the neoliberal body is shaped by ideas of self-discipline and wellness. It shows how neoliberal ideology enters bodily practices, wellness talk, and digital tools. Using critical theories of biopower, surveillance, and capitalist subjectivity, the study shows how the body is treated as something that must always improve, guided by market rules and health duties. Wellness was once seen as shared and whole. Now it is turned into a product and treated as a personal matter. This change hides social inequality behind ideas of personal duty. The essay looks at how discipline is taken in through digital self-tracking tools and wellness buying. It also looks at the effects on personal choice, identity, and ways of care. The paper also examines new forms of resistance, such as body neutrality, disability justice, and shared healing. These practices question neoliberal rules and suggest other ways of living with the body.

**Keywords:** neoliberalism; self-discipline; wellness culture; surveillance; quantified self; resistance

## 1. Introduction

In the era of late capitalism, the neoliberal model shapes almost all parts of social life. It affects work and rest, education and entertainment, and even daily bodily feelings. Neoliberalism works as both an economic system and a cultural idea. It supports individual choice, competition, and market rules (Vera, 2020). Under this system, people are no longer only workers or consumers. They are also managers of themselves. They are expected to keep improving their work ability, efficiency, and health over time (Rose & Novas, 2005; Lupton, 2016). This expectation turns daily life into a constant task of self-management and self-improvement.

A clear result of this system is the rise of the so-called “neoliberal body.” This body is not only biological. It is also shaped by language, images, and social meanings. It is formed through practices of being seen, being watched, and self-control (Foucault, 1977; Kent, 2023). In this sense, the body is seen as free and self-directed. At the same time, it is tightly controlled by market values. People are asked to show health as a moral quality. They are also pushed to increase their physical ability as a kind of social and economic resource (McGillivray, 2005). These two demands exist together and place constant pressure on the individual body. Wellness once focused on shared balance, care, and group health. Under neoliberal influence, its

meaning has changed in a deep way (Rahbari, 2023). Wellness is no longer treated as a public good or a social goal supported by policies and care systems. Instead, it is framed as a personal task. People are told to work on their bodies without end. They aim for physical fitness, mental calm, and emotional control as private goals (Welsh, 2020). Practices like yoga, clean eating, mindfulness, and detox plans once had healing or spiritual meanings. Now they are sold as lifestyle products. Their cultural roots and social meanings are often removed. Wellness becomes a sign of status. It shows control, discipline, and self-rule. This image of wellness is mostly open to people with enough money, time, and social resources (Lavrence & Lozanski, 2014).

This change can be clearly seen in the spread of digital wellness platforms and data-based health habits. In China, the fitness app Keep turns exercise into a game. It uses badges, rankings, and daily check-ins. These tools help users stay active. At the same time, they turn the body into a set of numbers and records (Docherty, 2021). Users are slowly guided to match their self-discipline with the app's system. The platform values clear effort, repeated action, and visible results. In a similar way, users on Xiaohongshu, also called Little Red Book, post their wellness routines online. They use tags, photos, and progress notes. Personal care becomes public content that others can see and judge. Wellness is judged less by personal feeling and more by likes, comments, and visual style (Eberhardt, 2024). These online habits strengthen ideas of self-checking, competition, and constant output. They do so while presenting wellness as freedom, choice, and lifestyle identity (Lupton, 2016).

This paper looks at the neoliberal body through the combined ideas of self-discipline and wellness. It focuses on how people are pushed, step by step, to accept market logic as part of daily life. It asks how neoliberal values change the way people think about health, the body, and personal duty. It also asks how wellness works as a tool that separates people in moral and social ways. These questions help explain how ideas of choice and care are reshaped under neoliberal culture. They also help clarify how

responsibility is moved from society to the individual body (Badr, 2022; Vera, 2020).

## 2. The Neoliberal Turn and the Internalization of Discipline

Neoliberalism works as a political and cultural way of thinking. It strongly reshapes how people understand themselves. It no longer sees the individual as part of a shared group or as someone supported by social care. Instead, it defines the person as an independent and self-managing actor who must run life like a personal project (Rose & Novas, 2005; Lupton, 2016). Under this system, market standards move into everyday thinking. People begin to judge themselves using ideas of efficiency, output, and improvement. Success is closely linked to constant self-improvement. Failure is explained as a personal problem tied to weak effort, low endurance, or poor discipline (Vera, 2020). The body, which was once shaped by welfare systems or moral rules, now becomes the main space where these market ideas are carried out and shown in daily life (McGillivray, 2005). This change places the body at the center of personal responsibility and social judgment.

Scholars like Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas (2005) build on Foucault's ideas and introduce the term "biological citizenship." They explain that in neoliberal settings, people are expected to take charge of their future health and bodies. They are pushed to reduce risks, follow healthy habits, and follow health advice from the state or companies. This pressure does not appear as force. It appears as freedom and personal choice. In this process, the individual becomes both the planner and the task itself. The body turns into a project that must be worked on over time. Value is created through health tracking, bodily control, and visible improvement. As a result, the neoliberal body is shaped by self-discipline. It is also shaped by self-selling. The body is treated like a set of assets that can be improved, shown to others, and at times turned into economic gain.

This form of discipline does not usually appear as direct control. It is built into daily habits and

routines. Food choices become moral signals. Eating turns into careful counting and rule-following through diets like keto, paleo, or intermittent fasting. Exercise also changes in meaning. It is less about enjoyment or play. It becomes a planned task with clear goals. Apps and digital devices record steps, time, and calories, and these numbers guide behavior (Docherty, 2021). Mental health follows a similar path. Practices like mindfulness and focus training are promoted as tools to stay productive and calm. At the same time, social causes of stress and shared forms of healing receive less attention (Rahbari, 2023; Welsh, 2020). The need to always improve the self slowly turns into unpaid labor. This labor has no clear end. It is praised by society and taken for granted in everyday life.

Within this system, the neoliberal subject becomes valuable in economic terms and symbolic terms. Health and fitness act as clear signs of moral quality and social value. A fit and controlled body signals self-control and social conformity (Kent, 2023). In this setting, discipline is not only forced from outside. It is also wanted. Many people link body control with strength and freedom. They often do this without seeing the limits set by ideology. The idea of choice hides the pressure to comply. Wellness feels personal and empowering. At the same time, it closely follows systems of tracking, ranking, and watching the self (Lupton, 2016).

### 3. Wellness as a Cultural Logic of Capital

In the neoliberal period, wellness is no longer seen as a shared or whole goal. It is now shaped as a personal activity guided by the market. It has changed from a public health goal into a consumer lifestyle that clearly separates people by income and status. This lifestyle follows ideas of profit growth and visual difference (Lavrence & Lozanski, 2014; Vera, 2020). Wellness is no longer linked to fair access to resources, community support, or public systems. It is turned into a private matter. It is sold as a product. It is also removed from political debate. At the same time, it becomes a planned display of personal effort and moral value. This

change shifts attention away from shared responsibility and places it on the individual body. This change shows a close link between wellness talk and neoliberal ideas. The market provides many wellness products and services. These include organic pills, plant-based food plans, costly gym access, biohacking plans, mindfulness trips, and wearable devices. All of them claim to help people improve themselves (Lupton, 2016; Docherty, 2021). Taking part in wellness culture becomes a kind of social resource. It shows body control. It also shows taste, money, and the chance to move up socially. A well-shaped body is not only healthy. It is also neat, managed, and admired. It sends signals about access to money and moral value. It also mixes self-care with self-promotion. The line between caring for the self and selling the self becomes unclear (McGillivray, 2005; Welsh, 2020). Wellness then works as both a health goal and a social marker.

Health is no longer treated as a shared political issue or a right protected by public systems. It becomes a moral duty shaped by market rules (Badr, 2022). Social causes of health problems, such as low income, unsafe housing, polluted environments, and long-term discrimination, receive less attention (Vera, 2020). At the same time, personal choice is stressed again and again. Illness, tiredness, or mental pain are often seen as personal failure. They are linked to weak effort, poor planning, or lack of discipline. This way of thinking removes the role of public systems and shared support in shaping health outcomes (Rahbari, 2023). As a result, care is framed as a private task rather than a social one.

Wellness culture also repeats and strengthens dominant ideas about gender, race, and class. Popular images of wellness often show a thin, fit, productive, and light-skinned female body. These images support narrow standards. People who do not meet these standards are often labeled as lazy or lacking discipline. This happens even when they face strong social or material limits (Welsh, 2020). In this sense, wellness works as a tool of control and judgment. It is not only a lifestyle option. It creates a split between the responsible person who invests in health and the irresponsible person who does not.

This split often follows existing social divisions and power structures (Lavrence & Lozanski, 2014).

Wellness in the neoliberal age focuses less on health in a broad sense. It focuses more on control and improvement. It works as a mild form of biopolitics. Care duties move from society to the individual. At the same time, every step of self-work is turned into a source of profit (Lupton, 2016; Rose & Novas, 2005). Rest and relaxation also change in meaning. Sleep tracking, digital breaks, and mindfulness apps promise better results and higher output. Market logic enters even quiet and private moments. Practices of care are reshaped into signs of performance, difference, and exchange value (McGillivray, 2005; Kent, 2023).

#### **4. Surveillance, Technology, and the Quantified Self**

In the neoliberal cultural setting, digital technologies have become very close tools for managing the body. They place systems of watching into daily routines. Devices like fitness trackers, smartwatches, sleep monitors, and health apps are described as tools that give power to users. They are presented as ways to check, study, and improve physical and mental states (Docherty, 2021). At the same time, there is quiet pressure. People are expected to keep tracking their bodies, keep adjusting habits, and keep improving results day after day.

The quantified self movement shows this process clearly. In this movement, people use digital tools to collect large amounts of data about their bodies and actions. Drawing on Foucault's ideas, Lupton (2016) introduces the idea of digitized biopolitics. She explains how the self is shaped and guided through data. She argues that self-tracking devices do more than guide behavior. They also change how people understand themselves. Users learn to see their bodies through numbers, charts, and system feedback. Health is judged through scores and trends. These systems create new standards and expectations. People become part of a constant system of watching and gentle control. Self-tracking becomes a shared form of labor. It supports wider

systems of control and management (Lupton, 2016; Docherty, 2021).

These technologies are not value-free. They carry clear ideas about what a good or useful body should be. They repeat and support capitalist values like discipline, competition, and clear results that can be measured (Eberhardt, 2024). Rest and free time also change meaning. Sleep is no longer just rest. It is checked, rated, and compared with others. Walking is no longer simple movement. It becomes a task measured by steps and goals. Technology moves control of the body away from personal feeling and toward system advice and data rules (McGillivray, 2005). This shift reduces trust in bodily sense and increases trust in numbers.

The spread of wearable devices and wellness platforms creates a culture of constant display. Many people choose to share health data on social media or with company wellness plans. They often believe this sharing shows self-control and effort (Lavrence & Lozanski, 2014). This sharing is described as personal choice. In many cases, it grows from social or workplace pressure. Being visible becomes a quiet form of obedience. The watchful system replaces older forms of direct control. The algorithm becomes the new observer (Foucault, 1977; Lupton, 2016). Control works through design and routine rather than force.

This change also brings mental effects. The quantified self often leads to stress, distance from the body, and constant comparison with others. When numbers do not meet set goals, they are seen as personal failure. Normal body change is treated as poor effort or weak discipline. The body becomes a task with no clear end. It is always behind the ideal set by data systems (Docherty, 2021; Welsh, 2020). Improvement is promised, yet satisfaction stays out of reach.

The line between work life and private life becomes less clear. Things that were once private, such as mood, sleep, digestion, and rest, are now recorded and made readable to systems of control. The home becomes a place where data is produced. Rest is defined as preparation for later work. The neoliberal subject shaped by technology becomes a unit that

produces data and watches itself. This subject is a user of wellness platforms. This subject is also a product inside the digital health market (Kent, 2023; Rose & Novas, 2005).

### 5. Resistance and Reimagining the Body

Even though neoliberal rules of body discipline seem strong, they are not without breaks, pushback, and other ways of thinking. In many cultural, political, and bodily practices, people and groups are actively rethinking how to live in and care for a body outside ideas of constant improvement, high output, and moralized health (Badr, 2022; Welsh, 2020). These forms of resistance do more than say no to dominant rules. They also suggest other ways of living that focus on shared support, connection, and a refusal to treat life only as a tool for use. These efforts open space for bodies to exist without being measured only by value or performance.

At the center of this discussion are the changing meanings of care, discipline, and improvement. In neoliberal language, care is often described as a personal duty. It is reduced to buying wellness products, tracking the self, and following routines meant to boost performance (Lupton, 2016). This view matches Federici's critique of how care work and emotional labor are turned into market tasks and removed from political debate (Federici, 2012). In contrast, shared or radical care focuses on mutual need, public support systems, and responsibility within communities. It pushes back against the lonely logic of self-management. In the same way, discipline and improvement, which are praised in wellness culture, can be read through Foucault's work as forms of control that people take into themselves. These ideas shape how people manage their bodies to match social rules about efficiency and moral worth (Foucault, 1977; Rose & Novas, 2005). Control works quietly through habit and belief.

One clear space of resistance appears in body positivity and later body neutrality movements. These approaches move attention away from the need to love, fix, or perfect the body. They focus on accepting the body as it is, without pressure to

change or seek approval from others (Welsh, 2020). This shift challenges fat stigma, beauty rules, and ableist ideas that are common in mainstream wellness culture. In East Asian digital spaces, for example, tags like "refuse body anxiety" spread widely on platforms such as Weibo and Douyin. These campaigns encourage users, especially women, to post unedited images and stories about tiredness and stress caused by beauty pressure. These acts are often framed as honest expression and care for the self (Badr, 2022). Sharing becomes a way to resist silence and shame.

The disability justice movement also offers strong criticism of neoliberal wellness ideas. Researchers and activists show how common health standards push disabled bodies to the margins. These bodies do not fit into systems focused on speed, output, and improvement (Rahbari, 2023). This work presents the body as something shaped by relationships rather than as a closed unit. Health is not seen as a personal win. It is shaped by access to space, tools, support, and care networks (McGillivray, 2005; Vera, 2020). This view shifts attention from personal effort to shared conditions and responsibility.

Feminist and queer critiques of the wellness industry also question its gendered and narrow ideas. They point out how care work, beauty pressure, and watching of bodies are built into wellness messages. Examples include tracking pregnant bodies and selling products that target women's fears and insecurities (Lavrence & Lozanski, 2014; Welsh, 2020). These critiques reject the idea that freedom comes from buying products or controlling the body. They support autonomy, pleasure, and bodily refusal as meaningful political actions. Choice is redefined as lived freedom rather than market choice.

Resistance often appears in simple daily actions. Rest can become a strong act in cultures that praise constant work. Slow living, eating based on body feeling, shared aid, and local healing practices all challenge the focus on speed, control, and profit (Kent, 2023). These actions take time back from market demands. They support the right to exist

without always improving or producing. Care becomes something shared and lived, not earned. Creative work also offers space to push back against the neoliberal body. Through art, dance, online media, and storytelling, marginalized bodies show presence, voice, and emotional depth (Eberhardt, 2024). These practices resist being reduced to numbers or health scores. They highlight feeling, memory, and lived experience. In doing so, they open space for the body as a site of meaning and possibility, not only illness, failure, or output.

## 6. Conclusion

The neoliberal body is shaped by constant demands for self-control and wellness. It is both a result and a sign of modern forms of power. This power does not work only through force from outside. It works through daily habits and moral pressure. People take this pressure into themselves. They regulate their own bodies through routines of improvement, performance, and self-checking (Foucault, 1977; Lupton, 2016). What looks like freedom, such as choosing a diet, planning a workout, or joining wellness programs, is often limited by market rules. These rules define what counts as a good body, success, and social worth (Lavrence & Lozanski, 2014; Welsh, 2020). As a result, choice exists, but it exists inside narrow and unequal boundaries. Personal freedom is shaped by systems that reward certain bodies and ways of living.

Within this system, people are reshaped as health entrepreneurs. They are expected to fully manage

their physical and emotional states. Responsibility is placed on the individual alone. At the same time, institutions step back from care duties. This creates a harsh moral climate. Illness, tiredness, or emotional struggle are treated as personal failure. They are rarely seen as outcomes of unequal systems or social harm (Rahbari, 2023; Vera, 2020). The body turns into a space of nonstop work. Rest, care, and reflection are pulled into cycles of output and consumption. Even recovery is framed as preparation for more effort (Docherty, 2021; McGillivray, 2005). Surveillance tools strengthen this shift. Measurement and comparison enter private life. Sleep, mood, steps, and movement are tracked and judged through numbers and charts (Eberhardt, 2024). Daily life becomes a process of watching and correcting the self.

The control of the neoliberal body is strong, but it is not total. It also faces challenge and refusal. Movements focused on body neutrality, disability justice, and shared care offer other ways of thinking and living. These movements reject the demand to always improve and optimize. They push back against turning life into data and profit. They argue that wellness should be understood through relationships, social conditions, and inclusion, not only through individual effort (Badr, 2022; Kent, 2023). These ideas move attention away from the polished and market-ready body. They place value on lived experience, exposure to harm, and mutual dependence. In doing so, they open space for bodies to exist without constant judgment or correction.

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