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PERCEPTIONS OF HIDDEN CURRICULUM, SCHOOL FACILITIES, AND TEACHING QUALITY AS CONDITIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING: A SURVEY OF PUBLIC GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOLS IN QUETTA, PAKISTAN

Kaneez Zainab

School Education Department, Government of Balochistan, Pakistan

deeyaali22@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: *
Kaneez Zainabi
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ABSTRACT

Schools shape thinking through unwritten norms, physical conditions, and teaching practice as well as formal lessons, yet little survey evidence exists on how these are perceived in the public girls' schools of Balochistan. This study surveyed 139 respondents (109 students, 25 teachers, and 5 examination officials) in six government girls' high schools in Quetta, using a 20-item questionnaire on hidden curriculum, facilities, and teacher quality (pilot α = .79–.86). Responses were analysed descriptively, with 95% Wilson confidence intervals. Respondents reported strong encouragement for questioning (97.8%) and constructive feedback (95.7%), but 41.0% disagreed that school culture is free of bias and favouritism, and majorities agreed that unwritten obedience norms (56.8%), teachers' conduct towards one another (74.8%), shortages of basic facilities (81.3%), and untrained teachers (71.9%) harm students' learning or thinking. Technology was the weakest facility area: 45.3% disagreed that ICT tools are used for learning. All respondents said teachers receive training, yet 26.6% doubted teachers' ICT knowledge. Because critical thinking itself was not measured, the findings describe perceived conditions for critical thinking, not their effects. Priorities include classroom-based coaching, school-level monitoring of conduct and bias, and investment in ICT and basic facilities.

Keywords: *hidden curriculum, school facilities, teacher quality, critical thinking, girls' education, Balochistan*

1. Introduction

Critical thinking, the purposeful judgement that involves interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference (Facione, 1990), is built or blocked by the everyday conditions of schooling. Three conditions matter in particular: the hidden curriculum, meaning the unwritten norms, expectations, and relationships through which schools teach beyond the formal syllabus (Alsubaie, 2015; Jackson, 1968); the physical and technological facilities available to students; and the quality of the teaching they receive.

These conditions are especially pressing in Balochistan, where school education has been constrained by policy incoherence and centralised, politically influenced management (Kakar, 2023). Public girls' schools in Quetta serve students who often have few alternatives, but little survey evidence shows how students, teachers, and officials perceive hidden-curriculum practices, facilities, and teaching quality in them. This paper reports a survey designed to fill that gap. It describes perceived conditions for critical thinking; it does not measure critical thinking itself.

Research Objectives

1: To describe how students, teachers, and examination officials perceive hidden-curriculum practices (questioning, openness and

bias, obedience norms, and teacher conduct) in public girls' high schools of Quetta.
2: To describe their perceptions of school facilities (classrooms, library, laboratory and internet, utilities, and ICT use).
3: To describe their perceptions of teacher quality and of teaching practices that support thinking, and to identify the conditions of greatest concern.

Research Questions
1: How do respondents perceive hidden-curriculum practices in their schools?
2: How do respondents perceive the adequacy and use of school facilities?
3: How do respondents perceive teacher quality and teaching practices, and which conditions cause most concern?

2. Literature Review
2.1 Hidden curriculum
Jackson (1968) showed that classrooms teach through crowds, praise, and power as much as through lessons. Later work described how schools transmit norms of authority and compliance, often unequally (Apple, 2004; Giroux & Penna, 1979), and reviews of the concept place teacher behaviour and school environment among its sources (Alsubaie, 2015). A hidden curriculum that rewards unquestioning obedience can work against the questioning on which critical thinking depends.

2.2 Facilities, teacher quality, and critical thinking
Facility quality has been linked with school climate and student achievement (Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008), and teacher qualifications and preparation are among the strongest school-level correlates of achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Digital resources add another layer: students' ICT skills, not infrastructure alone, drive digital inequality, so schools need to build skills as well as provide devices (van de Werfhorst et al., 2022). For critical thinking specifically, a meta-analysis found that dialogue, authentic problems, and mentoring improved outcomes (Abrami et al., 2015), which makes teaching practice central. Together, this literature suggests that culture, facilities, and teaching should be examined jointly. This study does so descriptively, for public girls' schools in Quetta.

3. Method
3.1 Design and participants
A cross-sectional descriptive survey design was used (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study was set in government girls' high schools in Quetta, which reportedly enrol about 8,500 students in grades 9 and 10 across 42 schools. Six schools were selected through stratified random sampling. Students were chosen at random from class lists, and teachers and examination officials were selected purposively (Etikan et al., 2016). Of 169 questionnaires distributed, 139 were returned (82.2%): 109 from students (78.4%), 25 from teachers (18.0%), and 5 from examination officials (3.6%). All respondents were female and came from public schools in Quetta.

3.2 Instrument and scoring
The questionnaire had 20 statements on hidden curriculum (Q1–Q4), facilities (Q5–Q11), and teacher quality (Q12–Q20). Respondents rated each statement on a five-point satisfaction scale from *very satisfied* to *very unsatisfied*. Because the items are statements, responses are reported here as agreement: "agree" combines *very satisfied* and *satisfied*, and "disagree" combines *unsatisfied* and *very unsatisfied*. Means use the coding 5 = very satisfied to 1 = very unsatisfied, so higher values mean stronger agreement. Four statements are worded negatively (Q3, Q4, Q9, and Q14, marked (−)); for these, agreement means that the respondent sees the condition as harmful. Pilot reliability was acceptable to good (Table 1), although α values from mixed-wording scales and small pilots should be read cautiously (Taber, 2018).

Table 1. Questionnaire Structure and Pilot Reliability

Section	Items	Pilot Cronbach's α	Items rated
Hidden curriculum	4	.81	Q1–Q4
Facilities	7	.86	Q5–Q11
Teacher quality	9	.79	Q12–Q20
Whole questionnaire	20	.84	Q1–Q20

Note. Cronbach's α values are from pilot testing of the instrument.

3.3 Analysis and ethics

Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were computed for each item in SPSS. Because responses came from one sample of 139, 95% confidence intervals for percentages were calculated with the Wilson method (Wilson, 1927). Under simple random sampling, the margin of error is about ±8.3 percentage points for the full sample and ±9.4 for students alone. A "concern" is defined as disagreement with a positively worded statement or agreement with a negatively worded one. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents gave informed consent.

4. Results

4.1 Hidden curriculum (Objective 1)

Almost all respondents (97.8%) agreed that students are encouraged to ask questions and think critically (Table 2, Figure 1). Yet 41.0% disagreed that school culture promotes open discussion and respect without bias or favouritism, and 56.8% agreed that unwritten rules requiring obedience to authority can negatively affect learning. Nearly three quarters (74.8%) agreed that teachers' wrong behaviour towards one another negatively affects students.

Table 2. Responses on Hidden Curriculum (N = 139)

Item	Agree, % [95% CI]	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	*M*	*SD*
Q1. Students are encouraged to ask questions and think critically	97.8 [93.8, 99.3]	0.7	1.4	4.68	0.64
Q2. School culture promotes open discussion and respect, without bias or favouritism	57.6 [49.2, 65.5]	1.4	41.0	3.45	1.44
Q3. Unwritten rules to follow authority without questioning can negatively affect learning (−)	56.8 [48.5, 64.8]	5.0	38.1	3.29	1.22
Q4. Teachers' wrong behaviour towards each other negatively affects students' learning and behaviour (−)	74.8 [67.0, 81.3]	0.7	24.5	3.88	1.42

Note. (−) marks negatively worded statements, for which agreement signals perceived harm. CI = Wilson 95% confidence interval. M and *SD* use the coding 5 = very satisfied to 1 = very unsatisfied.

4.2 Facilities (Objective 2)

Basic provision was rated adequate by most respondents: 77.7% said the environment encourages creativity, 76.3% reported no electricity, gas, or water problems, 71.9% reported sufficient classrooms and furniture, and 69.1% said library, laboratory, and internet resources are available (Table 3). ICT use was the weakest area: only 54.0% agreed that laptops, projectors, LEDs, and mobiles are used for learning, while 45.3% disagreed. Most respondents (81.3%) agreed that lack of basic facilities harms critical thinking and performance, and 93.5% agreed that better facilities can increase enrolment.

Table 3. Responses on School Facilities (N = 139)

Item	Agree, % [95% CI]	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	*M*	*SD*
Q5. The school has sufficient classrooms and furniture	71.9 [64.0, 78.7]	8.6	19.4	3.80	1.17
Q6. Library, laboratory, and internet resources support thinking skills	69.1 [61.0, 76.1]	2.2	28.8	3.70	1.40
Q7. The school environment encourages creativity and problem solving	77.7 [70.1, 83.8]	3.6	18.7	4.09	1.14
Q8. There is no problem with electricity, gas, or water	76.3 [68.5, 82.6]	0.7	23.0	3.91	1.39
Q9. Lack of basic facilities negatively affects critical thinking and performance (−)	81.3 [74.0, 86.9]	0.7	18.0	4.01	1.10
Q10. Laptops, projectors, LEDs, and mobiles are used for learning	54.0 [45.7, 62.0]	0.7	45.3	3.24	1.50
Q11. Basic facilities can increase students' enrolment	93.5 [88.2, 96.6]	4.3	2.2	4.36	0.70

Note. (−) marks negatively worded statements, for which agreement signals perceived harm. CI = Wilson 95% confidence interval.

4.3 Teacher quality (Objective 3)

Teaching practice was rated favourably (Table 4). Large majorities agreed that students receive constructive feedback (95.7%), that teachers enjoy teaching new subjects (89.9%), that methods develop logical thinking (87.8%), that multiple perspectives are encouraged (85.6%), that students are asked to defend their ideas (82.7%), and that tasks require analysis and reasoning (81.3%). All respondents (100%) agreed that teachers receive training. Even so, 71.9% agreed that untrained teachers struggle to promote critical thinking, and 26.6% disagreed that teachers know the importance of ICT tools and explain content well.

Table 4. Responses on Teacher Quality (N = 139)

Item	Agree, % [95% CI]	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	*M*	*SD*
Q12. Teaching methods develop clear, logical thinking	87.8 [81.3, 92.2]	0.0	12.2	4.40	1.05
Q13. Teachers receive training to improve their skills	100.0 [97.3, 100.0]	0.0	0.0	4.50	0.50
Q14. Untrained teachers struggle to promote critical thinking (−)	71.9 [64.0, 78.7]	1.4	26.6	3.90	1.34
Q15. Teachers know the importance of ICT tools and explain content well	73.4 [65.5, 80.0]	0.0	26.6	3.71	1.17
Q16. Students are given tasks requiring analysis and reasoning	81.3 [74.0, 86.9]	1.4	17.3	4.05	1.14
Q17. Students receive constructive feedback that helps them think critically	95.7 [90.9, 98.0]	0.0	4.3	4.47	0.75
Q18. Teachers encourage multiple perspectives before conclusions	85.6 [78.8, 90.5]	0.0	14.4	4.15	1.02

Item	Agree, % [95% CI]	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	*M*	*SD*
Q19. Students are often asked to defend their ideas	82.7 [75.6, 88.1]	2.2	15.1	4.01	1.07
Q20. Teachers enjoy teaching new subjects every year	89.9 [83.8, 93.9]	0.7	9.4	4.33	0.97

Note. (−) marks negatively worded statements, for which agreement signals perceived harm. CI = Wilson 95% confidence interval. Q17 and Q19 are worded in the first person, so they apply mainly to student respondents.

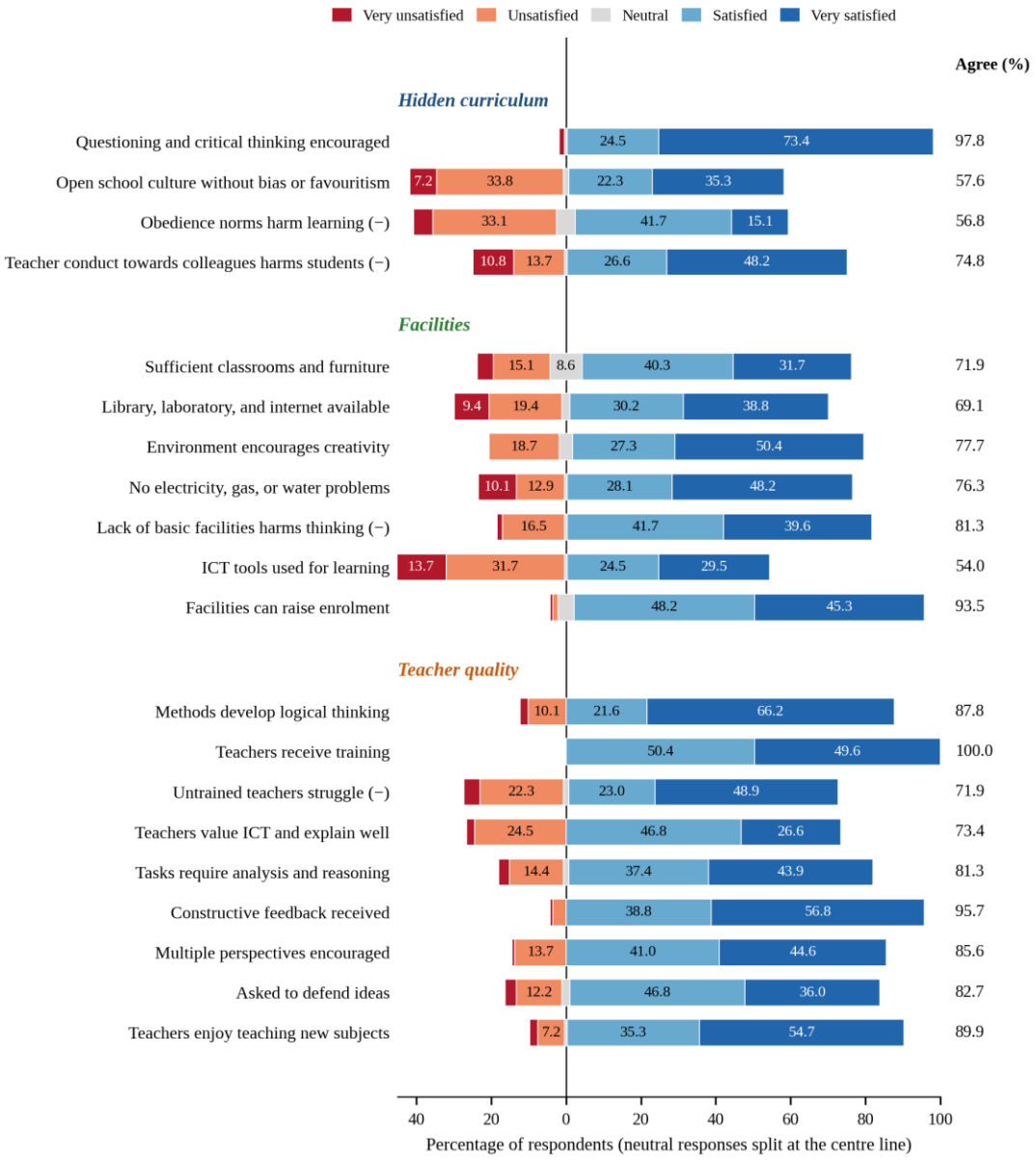


Figure 1. Distribution of Responses to All 20 Items by Domain

Note. *N* = 139. Bars are centred on the midpoint of the neutral category; labels show percentages of 7% or more. (−) marks negatively worded statements. The right-hand column gives total agreement.

4.4 Where concern is greatest

Figure 2 ranks the conditions by the share of respondents expressing a concern. Four of the top five concerns are beliefs that poor conditions harm learning: shortages of basic facilities (81.3%), teachers' conduct towards one another (74.8%), untrained teachers (71.9%), and obedience norms (56.8%). The fifth is limited ICT use (45.3%), followed by perceived bias and favouritism (41.0%). Concern was lowest for constructive feedback (4.3%), the encouragement of questioning (1.4%), and teacher training (0%).

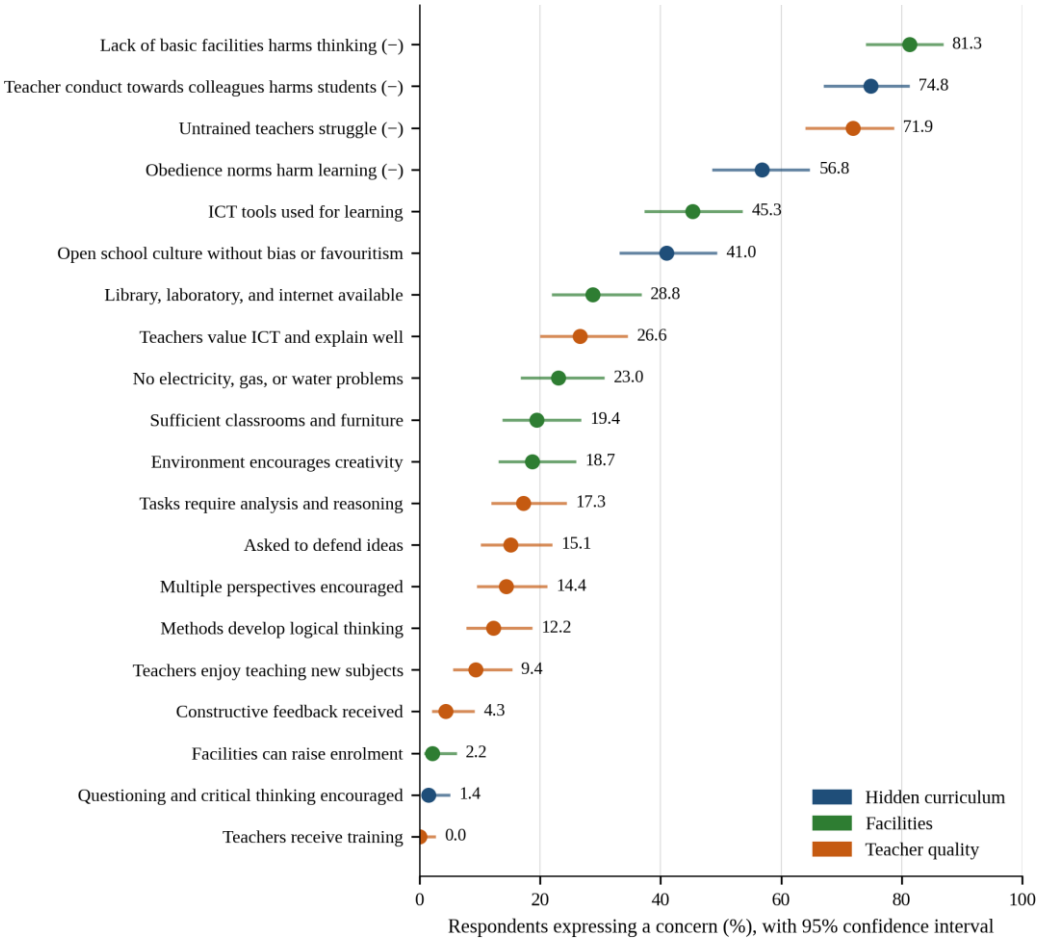


Figure 2. Conditions Ranked by Share of Respondents Expressing a Concern

Note. $N = 139$. A concern is disagreement with a positively worded statement or agreement with a negatively worded statement (—). Bars show 95% Wilson confidence intervals.

4.5 Summary of key findings

1. Encouragement of questioning is almost universal (97.8%), but 41.0% see bias or favouritism and 56.8% say unwritten obedience rules harm learning.
2. Respondents see poor conditions as harmful: 81.3% for facility shortages, 74.8% for teacher conduct, and 71.9% for untrained teachers.
3. ICT is the weakest facility area: 45.3% disagree that ICT tools are used for learning, against 71.9%–77.7% agreement on classrooms, utilities, and environment.
4. Teaching practices are rated favourably (81.3%–95.7% agreement), but 26.6% doubt teachers' ICT knowledge.
5. Every respondent says teachers receive training, yet 71.9% say untrained teachers struggle, so training availability and training effectiveness are not the same.

5. Discussion

Respondents describe schools that encourage questioning and give feedback, yet also schools where authority norms, bias, and staff conduct are seen as problems. This pairing fits the hidden-curriculum literature: an explicit invitation to question can coexist with implicit norms of compliance (Apple, 2004; Giroux & Penna, 1979), and an invitation without supportive norms may not produce the questioning that critical thinking needs (Facione, 1990). Because 78.4% of respondents were students, the high ratings of questioning and feedback largely reflect students' own experience, which is a strength for a study of learning conditions.

The facility results show a split between basic provision and technology. Most respondents rated classrooms, utilities, and the environment as adequate, but 45.3% disagreed that ICT tools are used for learning and 28.8% disagreed that library, laboratory, and internet resources are available. Facility quality is associated with school climate and achievement (Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008), and 81.3% of respondents believe that shortages harm thinking. The ICT gap seems to involve both resources and skills: 26.6% doubted teachers' ICT knowledge, which is consistent with evidence that digital skills, not infrastructure alone, drive digital inequality (van de Werfhorst et al., 2022). The pattern also matches the wider picture of resourcing and management constraints in Balochistan's school system (Kakar, 2023).

On teacher quality, respondents rated teaching practices highly, yet 71.9% believe untrained teachers struggle to promote critical thinking, and 100% say teachers receive training. These findings are not contradictory. They suggest that training is available but may not reach all teachers or may not translate into practice, a concern given the importance of teacher preparation for student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000) and of dialogue-based, authentic teaching for critical thinking (Abrami et al., 2015).

Limitations

Critical thinking was not measured, so the study describes perceived conditions and cannot show effects on students. Responses were pooled across students, teachers, and officials, and students form 78.4% of the sample, so role-specific views cannot be separated; two items are worded in the first person and suit students best, and one item combines ICT knowledge with explaining content. Four items are negatively worded, and agreement with them signals concern, which complicates simple scale scores; item-level results are therefore reported. The sample is modest, all-female, and limited to six schools in Quetta, with a margin of error of about ±8 points, so results are indicative and do not generalise to rural Balochistan or boys' schools. Some items showed ceiling effects (for example, 100% agreement on teacher training), which may reflect social desirability. Future work should add a validated critical thinking test, role-specific instruments, and rural and boys' schools.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Respondents in six public girls' high schools in Quetta perceive strong encouragement of questioning and good teaching practices, but also bias, obedience norms, weak ICT use, shortages of basic facilities, and uneven teacher preparation as conditions that harm learning. The findings describe perceptions, not effects on critical thinking. Table 5 sets out recommendations linked to the evidence.

Table 5. Recommendations, Supporting Evidence, and Lead Actors

Recommendation	Evidence from this study	Lead actor
1. Invest in ICT access and classroom use: working devices, connectivity, and a library, laboratory, and internet corner in every school.	45.3% disagreed that ICT tools are used for learning; 28.8% disagreed that library, laboratory, and internet resources are available	Directorate of Education and school councils

Recommendation	Evidence from this study	Lead actor
2. Replace one-off training with classroom-based coaching in inquiry methods and ICT, including peer observation.	All respondents said teachers receive training, yet 71.9% said untrained teachers struggle and 26.6% doubted teachers' ICT knowledge	Teacher training institutions (e.g., PITE) and district education officers
3. Adopt a school code of conduct for staff and a simple fairness check on grouping, praise, and discipline.	74.8% said teachers' conduct towards each other harms students; 41.0% disagreed that school culture is free of bias	Headmistresses and district education officers
4. Make classroom norms explicit and teach respectful questioning of authority and ideas.	56.8% said unwritten obedience rules harm learning, although 97.8% said questioning is encouraged	Headmistresses and teachers
5. Prioritise repair and maintenance of basic facilities (furniture, utilities, laboratory, library).	81.3% said shortages of basic facilities harm thinking; 23.0% reported utility problems; 19.4% reported inadequate furniture	Directorate of Education and school councils
6. Monitor critical thinking directly, with a validated test and separate student and teacher surveys.	Critical thinking was not measured; responses came mainly from students (78.4%)	Examination and assessment bodies and researchers

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