

ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES AND LOCAL SOLUTIONS

MARCH 2025



PUBLIC SERVICES ARE NOT A LUXURY!

FUND SCHOOLS, NOT WAR!



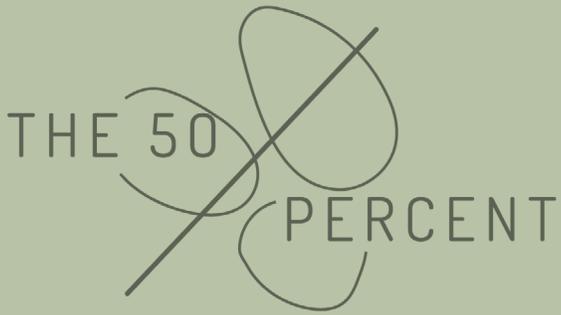
UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO
MISSISSAUGA

THE 50
PERCENT

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MISSISSAUGA



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EDITOR LETTER

For over four years, the 50 Percent has now been collecting and sharing stories from across the world. In the last two years, we have started sharing these stories also through our special edition zines - a collection of articles under one thematic umbrella, highlighting crucial issues in the world at the time.

Now, for the first time ever, we bring you a zine where the theme was not chosen by us, but by the writers who make this publication what it is. But this is not the only first when it comes to this zine. What you are now reading is a product of a beautiful collaboration with the University of Toronto Mississauga, where students and 50 Percent fellows came together to participate in a ten-week joint learning experience which touched on climate change, critical literacy, gender equality and the importance of decolonial perspectives. It was also a learning experience for us, as we explored what it looks like for a group of young people across the world with different perspectives, stories and experiences to come together and teach each other about what it means to be a global citizen.

In the end, the students chose current challenges to access social services as their focus topic. I think it says a lot, sadly, that youth from across the world, with experiences and backgrounds that are completely different

from each other, who are represented by right, left and centrist governments, all feel like current public systems are failing them - this includes their education, access to resources like public libraries and the health system.

But it also says a lot about this generation, that all course participants, some very reliant on public services, while others not so much, all felt that this was something they cared about deeply and wanted to change. As articles touch on the solutions and root causes of the various issues explored in this zine, you may realise that so much of what young people are experiencing across the world is interconnected.

But if the problems are interconnected, so are the solutions - which is what we call a systems-change approach. This is a beautiful reminder that if you pull on one thread, something completely different may fall into place. As you enhance public education, you may accidentally increase democratic participation. A more active voting base may lead to governments that implement effective climate policies. Well-designed climate policies may safeguard food security and lower the price of groceries - see where I am getting at?

Well, I hope that as you turn the next pages, you do.

**VANESSA TERSCHLUSE,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF AT THE 50 PERCENT**

WE NEED MORE PUBLIC LIBRARIES

TARIQ LAWAL

Just like many children and young people, I love to read. At my previous secondary school, I spent a lot of my free time at the school's library. I enjoyed reading books about historical events I didn't know about, social issues, and politics. Hours were spent at the library gaining knowledge which has shaped me into the person I am today. But time spent at the library didn't just improve my reading skills, it also helped me learn about historical and current events, helping me make sense of the world around me. Whether it is a news article about civic issues happening in my country and abroad or even an opinion piece on how Beyoncé is the greatest female artist ever, I certainly do love to read.

Nigeria, with a population of over 200 million people, has a relatively small number of public libraries, many of which are poorly equipped, outdated, or underfunded. According to the Nigerian Library Association (NLA), the country has fewer libraries than most countries with similar populations, and many of the existing libraries are concentrated in major cities like Abuja and Lagos, leaving rural areas with little to no access to such services. In urban areas, while there may be libraries, they often lack the resources or infrastructure to provide adequate services.

If not for having the privilege of attending a relatively well-resourced, federally-funded school in Lagos, Nigeria's largest city and commercial capital, I wouldn't have had access to an equipped library that has played a massive role

in my growth as a learner. However, millions of Nigerian children and youth still live in communities that do not have a single well-resourced public library, as due to the limited resources available for local governments to build public libraries, other public services are prioritized.



There are several benefits to having a public library in a community. Public libraries offer free access to journals, books, e-books, audiobooks, and digital databases. This levels the playing field for people, regardless of their socio-economic background, enabling everyone to access educational materials, research tools, and resources that might otherwise be out of reach. Libraries also help foster lifelong learning by instilling a sense of curiosity in children, helping them to read about stories that are different than their own, and helping them to develop critical thinking skills.

Public libraries also play a vital role in helping students of all ages with research, homework, and exam preparation. The Nigerian educational system already poses several

challenges, such as not providing students with knowledge that would be useful to them in our increasingly digital world. Giving children and young people access to public libraries that are accessible can help them in the long run.

We also need to promote reading among Nigerian children and youth, and for that, public libraries are essential. Studies show that Nigerian children and youth are now reading less than previous generations. Most of our time is now spent on our phones and tablets instead of sitting down and reading a good book. When all communities in Nigeria have access to public libraries, children and young people across the country may become compelled to visit them and use their resources to gain knowledge and expand their horizons.

Additionally, public libraries provide a sanctuary for children who may face challenging home environments. For many children, home may not always be a place of stability or encouragement for learning. Libraries, with their welcoming atmosphere, provide a neutral ground where these children can seek refuge from personal or family issues. They allow children to access a safe, quiet place where they can focus on their education and personal growth, away from the distractions or stress of their daily lives.

The lack of access to public libraries in Nigeria is a serious issue that affects the social development, education, and future prospects of youth and children across the country. Without libraries, children are deprived of learning, creativity, and personal growth resources. To address these challenges, the Nigerian government must fund projects to build public libraries, improve infrastructure, and promote library services in underserved areas.

By investing in public libraries, Nigeria can provide its children and youth with the resources needed to succeed and contribute to the country's development. Public libraries are an investment in the future of Nigeria's children and youth and the country as a whole.



THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL - THE PERSPECTIVE OF A GLOCAL CITIZEN

ESTHER ANYONA

“Think global, act local.” This renowned quote, attributed to Scottish conservationist Patrick Geddes in 1915, urges us to adopt a global mindset when crafting solutions to local issues. Reflecting on this quote, especially in the context of the term “glocal citizen,” I am reminded of my first encounter with this concept during The Global Youth Leadership Program (GYLP) by The 50 Percent. Since then, the idea of a glocal citizen has become a recurring theme in many resources advocating for global action to achieve global goals. When considering global goals related to access to public services, the notion of the

glocal citizen emerges as a sustainable solution. In this article, I will delve into the intricacies of this concept and its implications for access to public service globally.

Through the GYLP, I learned that I am a glocal citizen. As a glocal citizen, I embody the balance between global awareness and local action. I am encouraged to think beyond my immediate surroundings and consider the broader implications of my actions while remaining deeply engaged with my local communities. This dual approach is particularly relevant in addressing global goals, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to tackle issues ranging from poverty and inequality to climate change and access to public services.

I have experienced the application of the glocal citizen concept firsthand through my involvement with the Global Compact Network Kenya. This organization brings together members of the private sector in Kenya to achieve the SDGs by organizing learning sessions, and networking activities, and acting as an accountability partner for members striving to be more sustainable. From this perspective, I am prompted to wonder what such an entity would look like if designed to increase access to public services on a global scale through local actions.





Access to public services from a glocal perspective refers to the intersection of global and local factors in the provision and availability of public services. Here's how this concept plays out:

Global Influences on Local Services: International organizations, global policies, and agreements can set standards, frameworks, or guidelines that affect how public services are designed, funded, and implemented at the local level. For example, global climate change initiatives can impact local water management systems, while global health standards guide local healthcare systems.

Local Realities Shaping Global Perspectives: Local needs, cultural contexts, and unique challenges often influence global discussions and policies. Issues faced by communities—such as access to clean water, healthcare, or education—can be shared globally, highlighting the necessity of addressing these concerns within the broader global development agenda.

Integration of Global and Local Needs: A glocal perspective recognizes that effective public services must consider both global standards and local needs. For example, global digital health initiatives may require adaptation to local technological infrastructure and cultural understanding to be effective in different regions.

Collaboration Across Borders: A glocal approach to public service access encourages collaboration between governments, international organizations, local authorities, and communities. For instance, public health systems often require the alignment of local healthcare policies with global public health strategies, such as vaccination campaigns during pandemics.



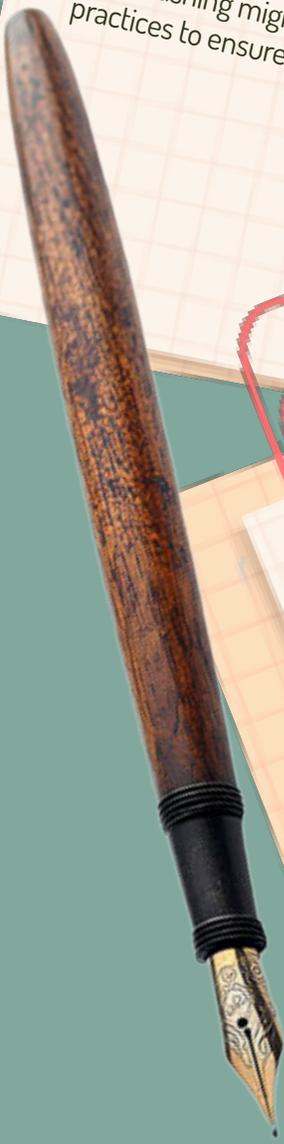


Access to public services from a glocal perspective means blending the global and local dimensions to create more effective, equitable, and culturally appropriate services. Across the world, there is a vast repository of best practices, technological innovations, policies, and frameworks that have been tested and proven in various contexts. Global organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations (UN), and the World Bank create research, guidelines, and frameworks aimed at solving key global challenges. A glocal approach ensures that local communities can tap into this global knowledge and access resources that might otherwise be out of reach, whether it's through funding, expert advice, or shared technologies.

Local communities have unique cultural practices, languages, and values that shape their needs and perceptions of public services. A glocal perspective emphasizes that global solutions must be adapted to local contexts to be effective. For example, a health campaign aimed at promoting handwashing might work globally but needs to respect local customs and practices to ensure it resonates and is adopted at the grassroots level.



Local governments may not always have the same level of infrastructure or capacity as their global counterparts. A glocal approach acknowledges these limitations and works to adapt global solutions in ways that are feasible with local resources. For instance, introducing high-tech solutions for healthcare may need to be scaled back or modified to fit the local health-care infrastructure, whether that means using mobile clinics or providing simpler equipment that fits the local context.



A core element of this approach is equity. Global frameworks often emphasize reducing disparities and ensuring that marginalized populations have access to the same quality of services as others. However, equity doesn't always mean the same thing as uniformity. In some contexts, local communities may require additional support (e.g., language translation services, gender-specific healthcare, or adapted public health campaigns) to ensure they can fully benefit from the services offered. This ensures that no one is left behind in the pursuit of global goals.



THE WEIGHT OF WATER: A LITTLE GIRL'S STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL IN AFGHANISTAN

AHMADULLAH MALAKZAI

In the heart of Afghanistan's rugged mountains lies a community known as Gardana Kart-e-Sakhi. These towering peaks and dramatic valleys form a stunning landscape, but behind the beauty is a harsh reality—many families here lack access to the most basic necessity of life: clean drinking water. This is not just a problem for adults; it's a burden that falls disproportionately on the shoulders of children, especially girls.

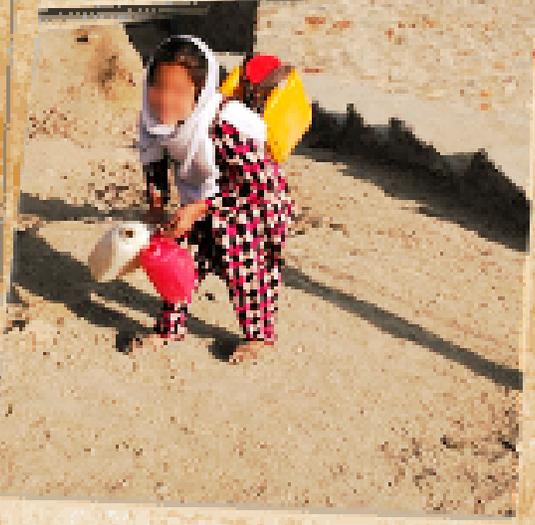
As an officer at the Research & Development division of the UNESCO's Climate Risk Informed Decision Analysis (CRIDA), I surveyed this community to assess its challenges and gather data for potential interventions. The mission initially seemed straightforward—consult the community representatives and elders, document their concerns, and report back. Yet, what I witnessed that day shattered any illusion of simplicity and left me profoundly moved.

After a lengthy consultation meeting with the community representatives and elders, I descended from the mountain.

Their words echoed in my mind: lack of clean water, inadequate health services, and no educational facilities. These were daunting challenges, but nothing prepared me for what I saw next.

Halfway down the rugged trail, I encountered a little girl, no older than eight, struggling under the weight of a massive water container strapped to her back. Her small hands clutched two additional bottles, and by her side were her even younger siblings—too small to speak—each holding smaller containers of water. Their frail bodies wobbled under the load, and their eyes mirrored a silent plea for relief.

I STOPPED THEM AND GENTLY ASKED THE GIRL, "WHAT ARE YOU DOING?"



She paused, her face drenched in sweat and streaked with dirt. Her eyes welled with tears as she replied, “This is my life. Every day, I climb down the mountain to fetch water and carry it back home. My mother says there is no other way. I tell her I can’t do it anymore, but she has no answer. We need water to survive, so I must keep going.”

Her voice cracked, and the tears began to flow. “I don’t go to school. I don’t have time to play. All I do is carry water, and it’s so heavy. My whole day is spent walking up and down this mountain.”

Her words struck me like a bolt of lightning. In that moment, she wasn’t just a child—she was a symbol of resilience, a living testament to the daily struggles faced by countless children in Afghanistan’s mountainous regions.

As I sat with her, I thought about the systemic challenges that had led to this heartbreaking scene. In many areas of Afghanistan, it is a deeply ingrained tradition for children to fetch water for their families. Once manageable due to closer water sources, this task has become a grueling ordeal as water tables have dramatically declined in recent years. As wells have run dry, communities are now forced to rely on distant sources.

The little girl’s plight is not unique. It is a story repeated in villages and mountainsides across the country. Families spend hours each day fetching water, leaving little time for education, leisure, or other essential pursuits. And as the water crisis worsens, the burden grows heavier.

Afghanistan’s fragile infrastructure and limited resources compound the problem. Climate change, deforestation, and decades of conflict have taken their toll, reducing water availability even in previously water-rich areas. The children of Gardana Kart-e-Sakhi are not just victims of geography—they are casualties of a broader environmental and social crisis.

As I walked away from that encounter, the image of the little girl stayed with me. Her tears, courage, and quiet despair embodied the urgent need for action. The story of her struggle is a call to arms for us all. In Afghanistan, where 70% of the population lives in rural areas and 80% of the country faced severe water scarcity during the 2021 drought, addressing the water crisis requires urgent national and international action—to prioritize access to clean water, invest in sustainable solutions, and to give these children the chance to dream beyond the confines of survival. The Afghan government must prioritize sustainable water infrastructure, such as wells, reservoirs, and water distribution systems, while fostering transparent policies and empowering local communities to manage resources. Simultaneously, the global community must expand funding and technical support to build climate-resilient systems and enhance local capacity, ensuring immediate relief and long-term water security for vulnerable populations.

The situation in Gardana Kart-e-Sakhi is a stark reminder of what’s at stake. Without immediate interventions, the water crisis will only deepen, forcing more families to flee their homes and exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation. But with concerted efforts—building water pumps, restoring wells, and empowering communities—there is hope.

That little girl’s journey up and down the mountain shouldn’t define her life. She deserves the chance to learn, play, and grow without the crushing weight of water bottles on her back. Her story is a testament to the resilience of Afghanistan’s people and a powerful plea for change.

**LET US NOT FORGET
HER TEARS. LET US
WORK TOWARD A
FUTURE WHERE THE
WEIGHT OF WATER
BURDENS NO CHILD.**



THE BANKING MODEL OF EDUCATION: A BARRIER TO INDIGENOUS YOUTHS RESOURCE ACCESS

STANLEY LIU AND AMANDA A. PEREIRA-REGO

Currently, Indigenous students in Canada have significantly lower graduation rates compared to their non-Indigenous peers. For example, only about 40% of Indigenous Canadians graduate from high school (Canada 2020, 2015). These low graduation rates contribute to difficulties in accessing stable and long-term employment: “In 2016, the unemployment rate for non-Indigenous men in Canada was 7.9%, while on-reserve men faced 30%. For Indigenous women, the overall rate was 6.8%, but on-reserve women experienced 19.3%.” (National Indigenous Economic Development Board, 2019). Therefore, this paper examines how the perpetuation of the

Banking Model of Education (Freire, 1968) —characterized by ignorance of students’ prior knowledge, marginalization of critical thinking, and deference to authority—can hinder students’ educational resource access and self-advocacy. Access to educational resources remains essential to Indigenous Peoples wellbeing and life outcomes (Vowel, 2016). Therefore, this paper also aims to provide a holistic understanding that challenges the traditional system, drawing upon Vygotsky’s seminal theories of the Zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding.

AN IGNORANCE OF STUDENTS' PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Public schools primarily adopt the Banking Model's conception that students are "empty vessels" that possess no prior knowledge or experiences in the construction of curricula (Freire, 1968). Teachers assume the role of experts (Freire, 1968). As a result, educators diminish Indigenous youths' cultural and traditional ways of knowing, being, and doing by prioritizing Western knowledge.

For example, an Indigenous student Steven laments "I don't like school period so...No cause I find that what they'll teach me is what they want... but the white people are just trying to make us learn what they want me to learn. If we went to a school without any others and we learn - as Greg was saying - a lot of stuff about natives... But [at my school] we went over it for like two days and then we switched to a different topic..." (Richmond & Smith, 2012, p. 7). "I don't like school period" suggests a fundamental disconnect between students and their educational experiences. The student does not associate themselves with the lessons content or activities, nor does the student deem the lessons outcomes as important and personally beneficial. In the speaker's concern about "white people" determining what is taught, a perceived curriculum bias suggests that the content taught is selective and may not adequately represent diverse histories or perspectives. Likewise, the comment about covering "native" topics for "like two days" before switching to a new topic also suggests a rushed, surface-level approach to significant cultural and historical subjects. The phrase "what they want me to learn" implies that students feel they have little educational autonomy, leading to decreased motivation and engagement. In

result, the public school system negatively impacts Indigenous Peoples learning and personal growth through an incomplete global comprehension and missed opportunities for meaningful learning practices.

Likewise, another student Tori shares how teachers' curricula did not reflect her Indigenous identity "Well we just felt like they [teachers] were so racist because they didn't teach us anything about our culture or language" (Richmond & Smith, 2012, p. 8). Tori interprets the absence of Indigenous content as racism which indicates how curriculum choices can be perceived as discriminatory, even if unintentional. When students do not see their culture and identity reflected in what they learn, it can lead to disengagement and a sense of alienation from the educational process. The quote indirectly points to the need for better teacher education and preparation to incorporate diverse cultural perspectives, particularly Indigenous content, in their teaching. While some may argue that disengagement and alienation occur due to insufficient resource allocation, this quote aligns with research findings that emphasize the need for education systems to better integrate Indigenous perspectives, personalized education, evaluation, and students' autonomy in curricula decisions. The actualization of these objectives will create more inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students.

DEPRIORITIZATION OF CRITICAL THINKING

The Banking Model of Education's deprioritization of critical thinking can prevent their ability to access resources. Teachers tend to reject critical thinking and prioritize memorization instead. For instance, an Indigenous student, Stephanie, shared her thoughts about school "I think of cubicles... I think of being stuck in cubicles and tired. Sometimes [I] feel isolated. I am always looking at the same walls. They teach the same stuff over and over" (Richmond & Smith, 2012, p. 6). Stephanie negatively perceived her school environment and described a setting dominated by cubicles, which suggests a compartmentalized, isolated learning space. The phrase "being stuck in cubicles" implies a feeling of confinement and lack of freedom. The words "tired" and "isolated" indicate that this environment has a detrimental effect on the student's emotional well-being. When students feel intimidated by an isolated environment, they will most likely be unable to think outside of the box. Not to mention that critical thinking requires significant mental workload for techniques such as the Socratic Questioning. The statement "They teach the same stuff over and over" expresses frustration with the repetitive nature of the curriculum. The student may feel unchallenged, or the teaching methods do not effectively engage them. Hence, a sense of disconnection and dissatisfaction with the school environment permeates, both in terms of physical space and educational content. However, the student most likely unable or unwilling to challenge the traditional methods imposed by the education system, due to fear,

paranoia, or societal expectation that "it was meant to be like this". An absence of critical thinking prevents Indigenous students from mobilizing resources to access and advocate for educational resources. As a result, they cannot apply these skills towards mobilization and advocacy of educational resources. Instead, teachers implicitly train students to become passive individuals who do not question the status quo.

Another student Daniel shared similar sentiments "I think of uniforms. I don't really like uniforms. Because you have to wear the same thing everyday" (Richmond & Smith, 2012, p. 7). Uniform discomfort appears to be a broader issue regarding student identity and self-expression. Mandatory uniforms further "indoctrinates" students' way of self-expression and ideologies. The restriction of those expressions limits personal expression, freedom of speech, and possibly the ability to question. This passivity in clothing choices directly impacts Indigenous Peoples' ability to express their culture, heritage, and political ideologies. For instance, Indigenous youth may choose to wear certain regalia for special occasions which may not be permitted under uniform regulations. Orange Shirt Day is another core example of how Indigenous youth could self-advocate, which uniform regulations discourage.



DEFERENCE TO AUTHORITY

Another major tenant of the Banking Model of Education involves deference to authority. Students' assumption that "the teacher is always right" solidifies their perception of teachers as experts. Students lack critical thinking skills that can be used as a catalyst towards their ability to question and advocate for resources. Besides, most institutions lack prior knowledge, or lack the will to explore students' existing knowledge before creating curriculums. As a result, teachers inculcate Indigenous youth into a system that often disregards or devalues their cultural knowledge, experiences, and ways of knowing. This approach not only undermines their rich cultural heritage and wisdom but also perpetuates a cycle of cultural erasure and marginalization.

Due to indoctrination and critical thinkings' de-prioritization, there are palpable economic and academic consequences of the Banking Model of Education. As an example, Indigenous Peoples who often feel like the Banking Model of Education excludes their ideologies and perspectives, experience difficulties accessing stable and long-term employment, "In 2016, the unemployment rate for non-Indigenous men in Canada was 7.9 per cent, but for on-reserve men it was 30 per cent. In the case of Canadian [Indigenous] women, the overall unemployment rate was 6.8 per cent, but for on-reserve women it was 19.3 percent" (National Indigenous Economic Development Board, 2019). When Indigenous Peoples secure employment, they often perform unskilled, low-paying labor, particularly in the sales, service, and transportation industries (National Indigenous Economic Development Board, 2019)

Implicitly or explicitly, education's purpose is to get students to learn. Therefore, any form of critical thinking in education, teaching, or learning, should revolve around students, because students are ultimately the ones learning. Assuming sufficient resources, every student should have a personalized diagnosis examining their

prior knowledge to curriculum activities and assessments. Consequently, students can uncover their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

The ZPD theory describes the difference between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance and support from a more knowledgeable other, such as a teacher, mentor, or peer. This zone represents tasks beyond the learner's current abilities but which can be accomplished with assistance, and learning occurs most effectively within this zone, as it involves tasks that are neither too easy nor too challenging, thus promoting cognitive growth and development (Shabani et al., 2010). Therefore, social interaction (involving collaborative dialogue and interaction) can further bolster these learning outcomes.

A related concept, "Scaffolding", involves breaking down large projects into smaller and more manageable tasks, asking guiding questions, or providing hints and feedback. Scaffolding's objective is for learners to gradually achieve tasks independently. As learners gain competence, the support is gradually removed in a process known as "fading," allowing them to complete tasks autonomously (Liu, 2024). To maximize the effectiveness of student learning, the system must advocate for personalized learning systems, such as tailored feedback systems from peers, teachers, professionals, and sometimes AI generated feedback, to stimulate, provoke, and engage with their curiosity. While testing is indeed essential for reference and evaluation, it should not be the dominant culture of education, as in the case of the Banking Model of Education system, often turning memorization into the only objective of learning.

As opposed to teacher-centric education models (instruction in a classroom setting where students perceive the same material at the same pace), tutorial learning offers a more personalized approach involving one-on-one or small group instruction, which can effectively address specific learning challenges, accelerate progress with tailored feedback, or explore subjects in greater depth. A shift towards more personalized, student-centered learning approaches that incorporate technology, hands-on experiences, and real-world problem-solving could better equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in today's dynamic workforce.



A ghazal is a poetic form of Arabic origin, traditionally composed of rhyming couplets and a repeating refrain, often expressing themes of longing, love, or reflection on life's complexities. In my poem, the ghazal structure explores contrasts in access to public services, capturing both the allure of wealth and the quiet resilience of communities with very limited resources; touching upon topics I presented in my 'Global Healthcare Disparities' presentation during this fellowship. Through each couplet, my poem reflects these disparities in healthcare, as well as education, public spaces, and belonging, especially in places like Doha, Qatar- highlighting both privilege and exclusion.

IN THE SHADE OF WEALTH: A GHAZAL ON ACCESS AND EXCLUSION TO PUBLIC SERVICES

MARYAM SHAHZAD

In Doha's warmth and glow, wealth gleams like a promise too close,
Yet shadows fall, for whom are these doors meant to close?

Hospitals rise, their spires gilded under the sun,
But workers gaze, healing dreams under hopes they enclose.

Classrooms bright as pearls, open for a few to embrace,
While faraway, children gather in rooms only walls compose.

A city of Islamic art, tall parks where the wind's at ease,
Yet some hold only the heat of sand that never knows repose.

Belonging feels like a secret passed from tongue to tongue,
Some are welcome, others on roads that forever transpose.

For a visitor, the streets unfold in endless design,
Yet a worker stands, uncounted, his roots in silence froze.

In spaces empty, the migrant seeks a patch of sky,
Longing for green and a bench where his body can pose.

Around the world, resilience weaves tales of what's enough,
Where services lack, the people's hearts they overexpose.

Glimpses of health, of water, each promise unkept yet known,
The right to a future a fragile, whispered overdose.

Here, screens blink with knowledge, the web a flickering thread,
While villages yearn for light to read by before bed.

The digital divide splits nations in a silent war,
Where bytes shape futures, yet access depends on what you wore.

Rivers flow with promise, yet walls keep the thirsty at bay,
Is it wealth or wisdom that lets some drink, some delay?

In one land, clinics, towers, and care grow tall as stone,
In others, women walk miles so medicines are their own.

From Doha's sleek shores to fields where forests once stood,
Some seek warmth in marble; others in earth and wood.

A life's worth, some say, is measured in shelter and ease,
But shelter to one is another's unreachable seas.

Men in suits speak of health, of schooling in global halls,
While children trade days for coin in unseen factory walls.

The climate shifts, and justice wavers in scorching air,
Some breathe clean, others wrestle smoke without fanfare.

An empty road calls, and a bus for some is waiting there;
For others, miles to walk with a burden heavier than air.

Access and care- whose right, whose privilege in a city so grand?
Some carry maps to dreams; others carry nothing but sand.

Between silence and speech, a chasm that widens each day,
For one to be heard, another must give voice away.

To belong is a wish, to thrive, a yearning withheld,
But who decides who is kept and who is expelled?

A city's high towers reflect wealth like polished stone,
Yet behind each pane, a story unknown, unshown.

Justice lives where empathy listens to silent cries,
Yet in crowded markets, who dares to lift weary eyes?



THE UNTAPPED RESOURCE: WHY MALAYSIA'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES REMAIN OVERLOOKED

XYANNA YAP

When thinking about public services, my mind jumped straight ahead to mental health because when I think about it, I have never known that Malaysia provided public mental health services. I have gone through a tough time dealing with my own mental health back home and did not seek professional help until I went to university. When I spoke about my own mental health challenges, I got ridiculed; people looked down on me, told me it was my fault and said I should 'deal with it', encouraging me to hide my state of mind and not be dramatic. I wonder if I had known about the services offered, I would have had a different experience.

Is there a lack of awareness of public mental health services?

I sent out a short survey on Reddit and Instagram, asking the public about the awareness of this system in our country. Out of 50 responses, 31 individuals (62%) said they had no idea about the existence of a public mental health service, while 38% said they knew. Around 50% out of the 38% were informed by the internet, pointing to online resources as one of the most effective methods of communication on the issue. However, as most individuals searched for information on mental health and only then found out about mental health services available to them, this brings up the question of whether the government is providing sufficient information on the issue and how it is targeting audiences to ensure the public is aware of such services. It is also surprising that 62% of individuals stated being clueless about this, which makes me want to advocate for change in the mental healthcare system in Malaysia.

Why are public mental health services not well-known?

Several reasons could adhere to this issue, but I do believe most of it is from the general public's view of mental health. According to a literature review by Munawar et al. (2018), perceptions of mental health in the country are linked to supernatural causes or a punishment from God, which sounds absurd. Still, it ties back to cultural and religious beliefs that have been passed down through generations. There are also more 'modern' perceptions that make engagement with mental health a challenge, such as believing the risk of embarrassment is not worth consulting help and potentially 'tarnishing' one's medical record (Hassan et al., 2018). Having to face discrimination and isolation from society and stigmas around mental health itself (Munawar et al., 2018) are also huge contributors. In addition to social perceptions, the healthcare system has its own limitations, such as the lack of funding and resources and hospitals are understaffed with professional practitioners (Munawar et al., 2018). Moreover, there is a lack of accessibility, as most public mental health services are only available in urban areas and inaccessible to rural populations.



How can change happen?

First, we must band together as a community, not just in Malaysia but everyone who wants to make a difference in their country. The most important thing to make change happen is to have the will to fight for that cause. Spreading awareness is one of the easiest things we can do as a first step, which many non-profit organisations (NGOs) have been doing over the past years. Work with NGOs and aid in spreading awareness, starting with those most prone to be affected by poor mental health. This will enhance mental health literacy and, therefore, increase the willingness to seek help from the resources that are available in the country. Moreover, it reduces stigmatisation from peers and family. Engaging the public on the issue will also help the government notice this is a bigger problem since individuals with unreported cases will be documented, hopefully increasing the quality of public mental health services.

Secondly, we can show the importance of quality mental health care providers such as psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses and psychologists, and advocate for more job positions in the public mental health care system, creating more opportunities for people to enter that field. This will help reduce the stigma against individuals interested in pursuing mental health programs and increase the likelihood of individuals being interested in that field of study. Having the government partner with NGOs, influencers, and celebrities to speak on the issue can effectively generate awareness. Discussing mental health care on popular social media platforms, as more and more individuals use them as their primary form to consume information and news, can also draw attention to its importance. Even if those stumbling across the information don't require help themselves, being educated on mental health can enable them to support someone in need and even potentially save someone's life.

Are there any current efforts towards public mental health services?

The World Health Organization (WHO) posted a recent article stating that the Ministry of Health (MOH) is trying to reduce adolescent depression by analysing their challenges through the 2020-2025 National Strategic Plan for Mental Health. In addition, they have collaborated with experts to shape mental health and advocated for sustainable solutions, all of which aim to help adolescents with their mental health.

Concluding thoughts

I'm hopeful that the government will change public mental health services. The COVID-19 pandemic was a stark reminder of the need for accessible public mental health care—something governments are slowly catching up on. I also believe that, as a community, we can spread awareness and encourage people to use the services that are available to them. Even though it may not seem much, small changes such as having more conversations on mental health and telling friends and family about services they may need could lead to ripple effects, such as more funding going into health care, and make a big difference.

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