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A CONCEPTUAL PAPER EXAMINING THE CORRELATION BETWEEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND GENDER INEQUALITY ISSUES AMONG WORKING WOMEN IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: Effective communication skills play a crucial role in the growth and progress of an organisation. In addition to enhancing marketing and administrative efficiency, effective management communication has the potential to enhance the reputation and image of an organisation. Inadequate mastery of communication skills is considered a significant element contributing to the problem of gender disparity in organisations in Malaysia. Gender inequality is a longstanding issue in Malaysia. Throughout history, women have consistently been stigmatised as a vulnerable demographic and have been perceived as lacking interest in governing a nation or participating in a professional organisation. Despite the considerable efforts made by women to demonstrate their competence in the professional sphere, discrimination against this group persists, particularly in administrative concerns. This essay seeks to examine the significance of acquiring proficient communication skills among employed women in Malaysia to address gender disparity in the professional environment. Hence, doing this study is necessary to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the communication abilities that women can cultivate in the professional setting, hence facilitating the reduction of gender disparities.

Keywords: *Communication Skills, Women, Gender, Organization*

INTRODUCTION

The topic of gender inequality has been a subject of ongoing scholarly debate throughout history. Gender studies is a popular subject of scholarly discourse worldwide. The prevalence of gender issues is ubiquitous and has been ingrained as a societal convention and accepted as a standard way of life (Thivyaa & Rani, 2022). Gender inequality is attributed to a range of causes that differ based on the prevailing circumstances. Some of the environmental barriers that have been identified as contributing to gender inequality in the workplace include a lack of immediate appreciation and support from superiors and management, unclear job specifications, poor communication among colleagues, and rigid and non-transparent performance evaluations (Zubaidah Zainal Abidin et al, 2008).

According to Thivyaa and Rani (2022), gender is a significant factor in understanding and predicting behaviour. According to their findings, derived from their research, both males and females are seen to possess the capability to perform identical activities. Despite their varying levels of physical endurance, they are nevertheless capable of performing the same activity.

Moreover, the way the media portrays gender significantly shapes society's understanding of gender roles. The portrayal of gender-specific traits in the media might reinforce societal expectations regarding the appearance and conduct of both males and females (Dorin & Delia, 2015). Gender identity is not inherent, but rather shaped by iterative expressions and performances, ultimately resulting in the formation of a gender identity that prescribes masculinity for males and femininity for women. Contrary to popular belief, women do not inherently possess femininity, and the same applies to men (Thivyaa & Rani, 2022).

The achievement of women in professional fields is becoming a common occurrence. Women who were formerly subjugated and deprived of their rights are currently proactively pursuing gender parity in diverse domains, including education, healthcare, politics, and more. Consistent with the trajectory of national progress, women have now begun to assume significant roles in both governmental institutions and private enterprises. Addressing the gender gap is crucial for achieving equitable community development (Kartina & Dayang, 2019).

Effective communication skills are crucial for personal growth, performance, information acquisition, skill development, training, and organisational advancement within a company (Hashim Fauzy Yaacob, 2011). According to Ivy Deirdre Mangkau (2012), good communication skills necessitate a combination of seriousness, experience, and genuine enthusiasm in one's job or field of involvement. Communication skills encompass interpersonal communication skills, intrapersonal communication skills, and non-verbal communication skills.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Throughout this time, numerous conjectures have been developed regarding the underlying factors contributing to gender imbalance in the workplace. Azlina (2012) states that the rapid development and modernization in Malaysia over the past 50 years since achieving independence have created ample opportunities for scholars and researchers to analyse various societal issues. He stated that the active involvement of women in the national development process has resulted in ramifications and produced several gender concerns in all areas of women's participation. Consequently, this phenomenon has garnered the attention of several scholars, researchers, and national policy makers who engage in debates and discussions through a variety of studies.

This study seeks to elucidate the correlation between proficiency in communication skills and the problem of gender inequality in the workplace, to offer a comprehensive understanding to society. The topic of gender has gained significant importance and has had a profound influence on the country, while also playing a crucial role in shaping policy suggestions, particularly in every development plan (Azlina Abdullah, 2012). The significance of women's contribution to a country's growth lies in their ability to augment the pool of human resources (Asri Selamat, 2009). Therefore, when women make advancements and assume greater responsibilities in the workforce, it is anticipated that they will make valuable contributions to the labour market and consequently enhance the overall state of the national economy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The problem of gender inequality in Malaysia has persisted from its inception, although it was not particularly conspicuous due to the limited representation of women in the workforce and in leadership roles within organisations. In the field of politics, Sabihah Osman (1983) stated in her book that women's involvement in the anti-session movement in Sarawak from 1946 to 1950 was influenced by the historical context of Sarawak, as mentioned in the article "Women's Political Participation in Decision Making in Sarawak, Malaysia" by Nadrawina Monday (2013). This "backwardness" is evident in a situation where women are perceived as being more engaged in domestic activities within the household rather than outside of it.

In the past, women were excluded and disregarded in politics, but this situation has now transformed. Women have started to gain the ability to express themselves and share their viewpoints. This change has been facilitated by the establishment of the Ministry of Women and Community Development, which serves as a platform for women to voice their opinions (Norhuriyatina, 2006). Aminah Ahmad (1999) supports this viewpoint by stating that during the 1950s and 1960s, women primarily pursued careers in agriculture, public administration, and local companies. Nevertheless, women's proficiency in technology, international trade, business, and services has recently been acknowledged.

Bouchier (1984) asserted that individualist-liberals, socialists, and radical feminists have a common perspective, concurring that women have been subjected to inequitable treatment based on their gender. They perceive gender inequality not as an unavoidable outcome of biological factors, but rather as a historical occurrence influenced by specific circumstances and personal encounters. They argue that several overarching institutional, political, economic, and social factors have intertwined to influence the gender-based allocation of work, which has created, justified, and sustained gender disparities in both domestic and professional spheres. Throughout history, various cultures have implemented gender-based role systems that grant men more power and control over resources compared to women. These systems have been influenced by religious beliefs (Ruether, 1981).

Gender disparity is more pronounced in impoverished nations compared to developed ones. Seema Jayachandran (2015) found that men generally earn higher earnings than women in these nations. Gender significantly influences individual behaviour in the workplace. Throughout history, the lack of equal chances and the imbalanced recognition of women in the workplace have significantly impacted female workers. They perceive that their rewards are influenced by other factors and are beyond their personal control.

Kessler-Harris (1982) asserted that historically, women occupied a subordinate position in assisting men with their work. By 1840, a mere 10 percent of women were employed in occupations outside of their homes, mostly in roles like as housemaids or unskilled labourers

in factories. Gender remained a constraint within the social framework throughout the nineteenth century. Kessler-Harris also stated that although women's education has been on the rise, it fails to provide broader work prospects due to the limited focus on household-related skills rather than income-generating abilities.

According to a study conducted by Karima (2012), the work sector involving customer service necessitates direct interaction with clients, making communication skills very desirable and crucial. As a result, women have a higher likelihood of being hired in this industry due to their innate ability to effectively communicate with clients. Women are deemed more apt for employment in the customer service industry. Karima reiterated that women are anticipated to possess proficient communication abilities in the realm of customer service due to gender-related expectations. This confers an advantage upon women in terms of their employability in this profession.

Gender Perspective Integration in Organisations

Women are integral components of the nation's valuable resources that require optimal cultivation to facilitate their active and impactful contributions to the nation's progress. Consequently, one of the primary objectives of the government is to safeguard women's rights and uphold their well-being, thereby ensuring the fulfilment of their life. To prevent the marginalisation of women in national development, it is crucial to prioritise gender concerns. This can be achieved by incorporating a gender perspective in the planning, formulation, and implementation of policies and development programmes. Gender equality is crucial as it ensures that men and women have the same chances to participate in and reap the benefits of economic, social, cultural, and political progress, without facing any hindrances or restrictions (Asri Selamat, 2009).

Nurulainy, Vivien, and Nur Hafizah (2022) argue that to effectively tackle the disparity in gender leadership, organisations should implement concurrent efforts to promote diversity in leadership and nurture the capabilities of young women for future leadership roles. Organisations must possess sufficient resources and capabilities to successfully tackle major issues and adjust to the ever-changing global environment. Organisations must also consider the changing requirements of female millennials, which depend on their specific professional phases. Hence, with the prioritisation of an inclusive culture and the implementation of talent procedures, policies, and programmes, organisations may develop a business model that fosters the success of all individuals, particularly female millennials.

According to Sarah, Stanley, and Robert (1994), both men and women encounter intricate social and organisational predicaments. Based on personal experience, each gender encounters distinct expectations in the workplace, at home, and within the community, which necessitate the investment of time and dedication from each person. Certain individuals lack the ability to develop an effective strategy for dealing with the conflict that often emerges, particularly among women, when they must choose between their work and their family. When an individual is unable to cope with this pressure, they will relinquish responsibilities that they deem unimportant and cease working. However, Lehman (1992) argues that gender domination continues to play a significant role in determining the chances of progressing in a long-term career, and there are still barriers to achieving equality between men and women.

Noor Azizah Ahmad, Mariny Abdul Ghani, and Zalinah Ahmad (2014) state that the National Women's Policy is implemented with the aim of mandating the involvement of various stakeholders to achieve the goal of developing a skilled workforce that can contribute effectively to national development initiatives. The progress of a nation will not occur if only one party is resolute in formulating a comprehensive plan to actively pursue it. The formulation of the National Women's Policy demonstrates the government's resolve to enhance the

participation of women in the progress of the nation in a more efficient, organised, and significant manner (Asri Selamat, 2009).

Moreover, the primary goal of the National Women's Policy is to provide a fair and equal collaboration between men and women in accessing resources and information, as well as in benefiting from opportunities and the overall progress of the nation. Furthermore, the National Women's Policy was established with the aim of incorporating women into all areas of national progress, considering their capabilities and requirements, to enhance living conditions, eliminate poverty and illiteracy, and promote peace and prosperity in the country (Sabitha, 1997)

Communication Paradigm of Women in Organisations

According to a study conducted by Ahmad Jawahir et al (2011), communication is a vital component and serves as the primary driving force in human existence. According to their perspective, it is essential for humans to engage in communication to articulate their viewpoints and emotions to others. Communication is a dynamic process that operates by utilising information. One individual performs an action or utters words, and the other individual reacts or responds based on their comprehension of the actions or words. Human communication is the act of comprehending the world and expressing emotions to others by assigning significance to spoken and non-verbal signals.

Effective communication is an essential aspect of organisational management. Moreover, communication is the act of conveying information, ideas, opinions, and plans across different departments within an organisation. Effective human interactions are unattainable in the absence of communication. Nevertheless, proficient, and efficient communication is vital not only for interpersonal connections but also for establishing a prosperous business. Efficient communication is necessary in all levels and facets of the organisation.

Interpersonal communication frequently takes place at multiple hierarchical levels within an organisation. Effective communication skills are crucial in an organisation to ensure clear and comprehensible message delivery. Each communication should successfully attain the intended impact, with the utmost importance placed on ensuring the message adheres to ethical standards. Communication is the process of exchanging significant information between two or more individuals, with the aim of ensuring that the recipient comprehends the intended message of the sender.

The efficacy of an organization's internal and external communication process is crucial in determining the overall success of a company in the business world. In the intricate realm of human existence, as technology advances, the demand for communication is growing and extends beyond interpersonal connections with friends and family. According to Omardin and Azhar (1990), the paradigm of communication in organisations demonstrates that communication inside organisations takes place in a complex open system environment. This communication is both influenced by and has an influence on the environment.

Human interactions in organisations are crucial as they facilitate the exchange of information among individuals, as well as between individuals and groups or groups themselves (Ahmad Jawahir et al, 2011). The way an individual speaks in their daily life diverges from their communication style in a professional setting. Effective communication with supervisors, colleagues, and personnel is crucial in any industry. Proficient communication skills can enhance your employability, facilitate career advancement, and foster success in your professional endeavours. Every member of the staff, whether in a government or private organisation, engages in interaction and communication with one another to accomplish the mission and objectives of the organisation.

One of the limitations that have been noticed is the limited proficiency of women in mastering communication skills within an organisation. They lack the courage to express their opinions or beliefs on a particular matter. These individuals can be classified as being part of the Spiral of Silence. It is a scenario in which a person refrains from speaking up due to the fear of being marginalised by a more dominating group. This viewpoint is corroborated by Hall (1972), who asserts that individuals have two options: they can either concentrate on enhancing the quality of their personal performance to meet all demands, or they can completely disregard the issue and refrain from attempting to manage their assigned role (reactive behaviour).

Additionally, Hall suggests that individuals could modify their personal attitude towards a specific role. Many gender inequalities in communication styles suggest that women are subordinate to males and should be regarded as inferior to them. This also has ramifications for gender disparities in leadership patterns inside organisations, as women are often perceived as being subordinate to males in this domain. This portrays them as unsuitable for leadership or managerial roles.

This assertion is supported by Karima (2012), where he asserts that the difference in rights, positions, and opportunities between men and women is a result of gender-based variations in communication style, influence strategies, and leadership models. Psychologically, men and women exhibit distinct behavioural patterns, including differences in communication styles and approaches to influencing others. Gender disparities in communication and the use of influence strategies also impact the differences in leadership patterns observed between men and women.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While women in Malaysia have made significant achievements in diverse domains, it is imperative to enhance their capabilities in the economic, social, and political sectors to assure their well-being, contentment, and gender equality in the workplace, particularly considering global transformations. Malaysian women have seen significant changes in terms of their status, function, and welfare, which has positioned them as a crucial asset in the country's development (Azlina, 2012). Hence, it is plausible that women may eventually attain a superior position, thereby garnering international recognition for their accomplishments and enhancing the reputation of their country.

Academic research on psychological gender differences has demonstrated that women employ communication to enhance social interactions and form connections, whereas men utilise language to assert dominance and attain concrete outcomes (Leaper, 1991; Maltz & Borker, 1982; Wood, 1996; Mason, 1994). The existence of gender variations in communication styles and influence strategies has led to the development of conventional gender roles that impact the behaviour of both men and women in professional settings. The primary distinction between men and women in terms of their communication styles arises from their divergent perspectives on the purpose of conversation.

In addition, Sarah, Stanley, and Robert (1994) argue that the organization's professional attitude also influences how it addresses the problem of gender inequality. This is since all personnel in the organisation are resolute in delivering their utmost performance in their work daily. Every organisation recognises that maintaining a strong professional reputation is crucial for achieving success and avoiding failure. Therefore, they make efforts to retain their most skilled and experienced employees. It is important to maintain a high level of professionalism in corporate communication to establish communication partnerships based on certification and high credentials. Professional women should adhere to professional ethics to uphold their social status and prominence.

Overall, while prior research has identified multiple variables contributing to gender inequality in the workplace, it is crucial to address the lack of proficiency in communication skills and its influence on this issue specifically in Malaysia. According to Ahmad Jawahir et al (2011), the quality of an organisation is directly linked to the efficiency of its communication process. Women are sometimes perceived as hesitant to express their thoughts and assert their rights through appropriate methods. Female participation in trade unions is infrequent, resulting in a lack of representation for women's concerns that should be addressed and advocated for inside trade unions. Furthermore, it is necessary to enhance the organization's training modules, workshops, and communication skills courses to address any deficiencies and enhance efficient workplace communication. The purpose of this is to enhance women's bravery in expressing their viewpoints and to further refine their communication abilities, particularly in professional settings.

Furthermore, it is imperative to delve deeper into the importance of communication skills in addressing the issue of gender inequality to completely eradicate this problem in the future. Hence, it is imperative for women to acquire suitable expertise and understanding to enhance their competitiveness and effectively confront the obstacles posed by globalisation. Communication is regarded as a crucial factor in enhancing the efficiency of an organisation. It is via efficient communication that individuals may be integrated into work groups, and the success of an organisation is contingent upon the quality of communication employed (Timm & De Tienne, 1995).

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THE ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT GENERATIVE AI ON DECISION-MAKING AMONG LEADERS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract: This conceptual paper discusses the roles of knowledge about generative artificial intelligence (GAI) on decision-making among leaders in public universities. This paper uses literature review technique. The result of this discussion is the roles of GAI knowledge on decision-making from the perspective of leaders in public universities among members of the senate and top management. GAI helps to automate the creation of digital content that transforms teaching and learning, research, and academic publishing paradigms in public universities. Leaders in public universities equipped with knowledge of GAI's transformative potentials as well as its disruptive risks can leverage their strategic positions to plan and manage university governance frameworks for the ethical use of AI in higher learning institutions. They can involve stakeholders from the government, academia, industry, and society, to harness the benefits of GAI technology ethically to enhance research, publication, as well as teaching and learning while managing its inherent risks. Their decisions steer the ethical integration and adoption of technology into the academic functions in higher learning institutions in the University 4.0 era. This paper suggests the need for an empirical case study on the successful implementation of GAI regulations in academia from the perspective of educational leaders.

Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence, Knowledge, Educational Leaders, Public Universities

INTRODUCTION

Educational leaders in the context of public universities are responsible for leading the institutions to achieve their objectives and to spearhead the advancement in teaching, learning, research, publication, and the activities related to the expansion of knowledge in general. According to Chkheidze (2023), educational leaders set the vision, mission, and ensure a conducive learning environment for students and teachers, while also developing values and promoting change in teaching and learning. The recent ongoing advancement of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) technology that can automatically generate digital content including text, images, codes, and other digital media has greatly disrupted these domains by enabling the rapid production of realistic content for users (Fezari et al., 2023; Goldstein et al., 2023). For leaders in public universities, their decisions shape the strategies for developing and sharing innovations in public universities that align with current development. They have the bird-eye view from their strategic position to allocate the funds and resources in facing the current of education 4.0 and university 4.0 where emerging technology like GAI are used to enhance teaching and learning outcomes as well as transform every aspect of university operations.

In the context of higher learning institutions, GAI tools help students to generate digital content that is almost similar to human creations for educational purposes. For example, GAI tools that converse with users through chat interface and generate text for users like ChatGPT, Jenni.AI, and Claude.AI have transformed the conventional way of education processes by allowing students to easily generate essay drafts, answer questions, solve arithmetic problems, generate citations, and generate codes. More and more GAI tools are available to help users generate digital content cheaper and faster. As these GAI tools transform the teaching and learning processes and academic publishing, university leaders must account for its implications in the university policies and strategic planning by integrating technology and transformative approaches to education. Their oversight in leadership and governance is vital to steer universities in the digital age to harness GAI's potential for academic effectiveness and efficiency. As Rashid et al. study in 2016 implied, leadership decision-making is the most significant factor in strategic planning at public universities, followed by leadership style and change flexibility.

This means that public university leaders need to equip themselves with the knowledge about GAI for judicious adoption in academic functions while maintaining academic integrity. This paper conceptualizes knowledge based on the definition proposed by Hauke (2019), which characterizes knowledge as an active engagement with ideas, arguments, and the world around us. Knowledge is viewed as a complex, integrative, and reciprocal process that unites the knower with the subject to be known. Specifically, in the context of this research, it refers to the educational leaders engagement and decisions towards GAI technology in public universities. Effective decision-making in higher education requires thoughtful and precise leadership, focusing on systematic planning and swift response to unanticipated situations (Ololube et al., 2021) like rapid technological development and utilization of GAI tools in universities. As university leaders chart their institutions' trajectories, the knowledge of GAI forms the baseline for the application of GAI in their decisions for institutional policy making. The knowledge dimension allows university leaders to progress from concrete to more abstract thinking in a construct defined by factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive knowledge, making use of Bloom's Taxonomy action verbs (BTAV) in the cognitive process in any area of the knowledge dimension (Waite et al., 2020). For instance, C. Wu et al. (2023) taxonomy of decision-making for strategic decision-making used Bloom's Taxonomy top-

down classification approach in cognitive domains as the foundation. Overall, public university leadership steer appropriate GAI adoption despite its disruptive impact on education.

Statement of the problem and research question

The inherent flaw of the AI language model and the risk of misuse of GAI tools in academics poses threats to the academic integrity which has been safeguarded by all levels of educational institutions (Glendinning, 2022). Without interventions, the high accessibility and rapidly improving capabilities provided by these freely available tools create risks of misuse for cheating, plagiarism, and hindering the development of critical thinking skills (Hewett, 2023) among students and faculty alike. Several studies discussed the limited effectiveness of institutional detection processes (Chaka, 2023; Heilweil, 2022, Miller, 2023; Perkins et al., 2024), deterrence policies, and technical solutions to this AI-generated digital content, undercutting foundational values of merit and honesty in education. As an example, the ability of the GPT-3 language model to generate several paragraphs of synthetic content that people find difficult to distinguish from human-written text represents a concerning milestone in this regard (Brown et al., 2020). Therefore, better insight by university leaders is urgently required to guide university governance strategies for the ethical use of AI to minimize the risks of cheating and plagiarism in academic cultures. This paper hence conceptualizes the knowledge of university leaders around GAI across higher learning institution's contexts in their decision-making amidst the emerging threats to academic integrity.

To do that, this paper will discuss the knowledge of GAI among university leaders based on BTAV, from identifying GAI applications in lessons and assessments to discerning proper safeguards while simultaneously avoiding the stifling of technology development and minimizing its risks. Effectively fostering cultures of ethics around AI amidst techno-social change requires insight and judgment from university leaders for ethical integration and adoption into education contexts. By conceptualizing leadership knowledge, this paper aims to identify the roles of knowledge about GAI on decision-making among leaders in public universities.

Research question: What are the roles of knowledge about GAI in decision-making among leaders in public universities in the literature?

To answer the research question, the objective of this paper is stated below:

Research objective: To identify the roles of knowledge about GAI in decision-making among leaders in public universities from the literature review.

To achieve the research objective, this paper explores conceptual frameworks and generates new ideas for the roles of university leaders' knowledge about GAI on their decision-making. The concepts will be developed from the thematic analysis of the literature. This paper also discusses university leadership and concludes the informed decisions in university governance, which contribute to the ethical use of GAI tools at the institutional level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public universities typically follow a hierarchical structure where major decisions flow from the top management down through the ranks of administration, operation, and students. University leaders comprised of the chancellor, vice-chancellors and senate determine the strategic directions that shape policies, investments, and initiatives adopted across all schools,

institutes or academies, centres, and departments. While advisory bodies representing the university stakeholders provide input, ultimate authority over consequential choices around issues like technological integration and adoption rests with leaders at the senior administrative and top management roles. This top-down decision-making model enables institution-wide alignment and coordinated implementation of the whole university operation. Their leadership insight, mission, and judgment in areas like identifying and assessing emergent technologies in education determine the implementation of institutional policies for teaching and learning, research and operational aspects affecting administrative and academic staff and students. Hence the discernment of public university leaders takes on elevated importance for navigating shifts in technology for education.

Since the release of the AI chatbot ChatGPT by OpenAI in November 2022, many GAI applications capable of autonomously generating text, images, code and other digital content have rapidly emerged and proliferated online. Students can easily and frequently use these applications since most university students own a smartphone (Okonkwo & Ade-Ibijola, 2021). Smartphone devices have become indispensable educational aids since the pandemic era with the need for distance learning and instant access to communication and information. With tools and applications downloadable as mobile apps or accessible through web interfaces, university students can leverage these tools for various academic tasks and other purposes anytime whenever they are connected to the internet. Therefore, university leaders must proactively examine the implications of these transformative yet disruptive AI-powered tools becoming readily available in the hands of tech-savvy students.

Recent literature discusses a mixture of excitement and apprehension (Lim et al., 2023), because of the capacity of GAI tools to comprehend and generate text like humans (Floridi, 2023; Lim et al., 2023; Teubner et al., 2023). Most GAI tools are released to the public as consumer applications, hence there are cases of misuse of the technology in education (Mannuru et al., 2023). Educational leaders at the managerial level of decision-making can include GAI in the complex and diverse psychological processes of planning, organization, motivation, control, regulation, and analysis (Horban, 2021) related to GAI adoption in their institutions.

In the context of GAI technology integration and adoption in public universities, the leaders' decisions should align between national higher education strategy, objectives, and values with the academic goals across the classroom, schools, and discipline. In Malaysia for example, the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) issued Advisory Note No. 2/2023 in March 2023 as a reference for higher learning institutions including public universities and students. The advisory note addressed the rise of GAI applications, its potential and risks, and the need for universities including academic staff and students to adopt the technology ethically as well as uphold academic integrity.

University leader's decisions shape the institution's direction, including investments in technology and educational tools. Knowledge of GAI allows them to make informed decisions about its integration into academic functions and operations. By proactively equipping their communities with substantive GAI knowledge, universities position themselves to judiciously integrate GAI tools and applications to augment research, teaching and learning in the current education 4.0 and university 4.0 era. For example, the fundamental knowledge of the taxonomy and typology of GAI tools advances our practical understanding, strengthens the distinguishability, as well as adds clarity to the discourse of GAI potential (Strobel & Möller, 2024). As Shao-Wei's (2011) study suggested, university leaders can improve their decisiveness and promote competition and development by understanding decision processes, optimizing decision-making gravity, enhancing analytical judgments, exercising decisive quality, developing strategic thinking, and stressing democratic participation. This means that university leaders can include stakeholders and experts from academics, industries, and

governments to contribute in improving the policy and governance best practices for education. These efforts cultivate informed and calibrated perspectives and understanding that consider GAI potential and its disruptive nature.

Knowing GAI's abilities to automate digital content creation like lesson planning, materials, and initial draft submissions enables informed decisions among university leaders to craft guidelines and mechanisms that balance the efficiency and academic integrity concerns. In liberal arts studies, for example, student's assessments are mostly done through essay writing. Therefore, the prohibition of GAI application assistance in students' writing assessments might not always be plausible. The use of GAI tools in writing potentially helps students to learn at their own pace like a personalized tutor, overcoming the constraints of lecturers' face-to-face interaction within limited lecture periods. In such cases, AI-assisted learning expands students' theoretical knowledge, writing skills, and understanding of fundamental concepts in their discipline that fulfil course learning outcomes. On the other hand, opting to implement authentic assessments such as project-based learning to avoid AI-assisted or AI-generated content in assessments altogether might not be practical for all disciplines and also risk stifling the development of students' writing skills, which is important for the expansion of knowledge.

Autonomy for teachers allows them to exercise their own judgment to set and monitor the boundaries for acceptable and not acceptable use of GAI tools in lectures accordingly. Through direct interaction with students, teachers are better positioned to detect potential cheating behaviours by identifying inconsistencies in written work, without necessarily relying on AI detection tools on every single submission. For instance, ChatGPT is not always capable of fluently generating output in Malay the Malaysian way because of its training data. It often generates responses in Malay that sound more Indonesian than Malaysian, which is noticeable by native speakers. The free version of ChatGPT also cannot access real-time information. In such cases, teachers can apply problem-based learning and allow students to use ChatGPT to help them answer questions based on current events in Malay. In this specific scenario, students can use GAI tools ethically, learn new information, and develop critical thinking with minimal risk of claiming AI-generated content as their own.

Moreover, based on a systematic literature review by Labadze et al. (2023), they concluded that incorporating AI chatbots in education brings personalized learning for students and time efficiency for educators. By embracing the advancement of GAI in universities, university leadership can promote technology adoption and resilience among academics and students. Some universities also use their funds to subscribe to AI detection tools to detect the risk of misuse of GAI tools that threaten academic integrity. However, these tools also incorrectly differentiate between human-written and AI-generated texts. As Chaka's study in 2023 concluded, AI content detectors like GPTZero, OpenAI Text Classifier, Writer.com's AI Content Detector, Copyleaks AI Content Detector, and Giant Language model Test Room seem not yet fully ready to accurately and convincingly detect AI-generated content from machine-generated texts in different contexts (Chaka, 2023b). The limitations of current AI detection applications only add to the lecturers' workloads when assessing students' learning outcomes because despite its goal to automatically identify AI-generated content submissions, the imperfect performance of these tools needs manual verification processes by teachers. This additional burden falls on teachers who must turn on the power of their computers, connect to the internet, log in or set up their account, select students' submissions and upload each submission, waiting for the machine algorithm to detect potential AI assistance or AI-generated content, and finalize students' marks. AI detection tools are designed to scrutinize submissions and identify potential AI-generated content, their results may not always be accurate or conclusive. Teachers or examiners still need to double-check the tool's findings and cross-verify the results. This additional layer of verification can place an unnecessary burden on

educators, creating an extra workload that detracts from their primary responsibility of conducting fair and meaningful evaluations. Students and GAI tools developers might as well come up with deceit mechanisms or AI-powered tools to bypass detection processes which might further threaten academic integrity and learning process.

Using technological solutions to flag AI misuse in students' writing only makes the assessments become an even more laborious endeavour that requires time, money, energy, and resources. It also creates an impression that teachers are sceptics and students are incapable of learning and prone to cheating. This situation hinders the university's goal to nurture a conducive education environment for students' authentic growth and learning process. Therefore, university leaders must include other deterrence mechanisms to avoid compromise in academic integrity. Whether through advances in machine learning forensics and computational linguistics, prohibiting students from taking digital devices on certain assessments, self-regulatory trainings, compliance to GAI adoption ethical framework, modifying certain writing assignments to involve additional in-class work, peer review, and peer editing altogether, proactive solutions are needed. After all, AI writing tools use machine learning (ML) techniques on language model algorithms to learn from vast datasets and learn patterns from statistical relationships and contextual nuances in training data. Language models allow these tools to generate sequences of text. From one perspective, using AI tools is comparable to using search engines or dictionaries or calculators to help achieve learning outcomes, answer questions, and solve a problem.

The use of GAI tools among students also becomes a motivation in learning because they are engaged by interactive systems such as chatbots, which allow them to study in an exciting and comfortable environment (Chen et al., 2020; Pham et al., 2018; Rooein, 2019; Troussas et al., 2017). Consequently, the use of chatbots in education helps to increase student engagement (Molnár & Szuts, 2018; Lam et al., 2018, pp. 18–19; Adamopoulou & Moussiades, 2020). When using GAI tools in learning, students can develop their critical thinking especially when they use the tools to generate information on topics that students are already familiar with, which they learn from lectures. This way students can evaluate and question the accuracy of AI-generated information, not blindly accept every AI-generated information or compromise academic integrity.

For students, researchers, scholars, and academicians, the academic writing mechanism of citations and references helps preserve integrity and protect them from plagiarism by explicitly acknowledging and crediting the original sources from which information is derived. Citations not only recognize the contributions of others but also foster a culture of transparency and accountability in the expansion of knowledge. However, the information generated by GAI tools does not always provide references and cite the source accurately. AI chatbots like ChatGPT are designed for conversation, not academic writing. AI text generators like Claude can provide made-up citations and references, and Perplexity AI can use unreliable sources to generate information. Therefore, users still need to verify the information to avoid misinformation and misconception. For academic writing, they need to trace and cite the source of information to avoid plagiarism.

University leaders should consider assigning compulsory training and academic discourse on ethical ways to conduct AI-assisted academic writing in universities. The guidelines of ethical AI-assisted writing should be as clear as student manuals or university policy documents. Documentation of the code of ethics for GAI adoption writing should include ethical principles such as what is right, wrong, good, bad, and balance everything in between, which reflect university's normative ethics. Furze et al. (2024) proposed AI Assessment Scale (AIAS), a flexible framework for incorporating GAI into educational assessments as shown in Table 1 below.

	LEVEL OF AI USAGE	DESCRIPTION
1	NO AI	The assessment is completed entirely without AI assistance. This level ensures that students rely solely on their knowledge, understanding, and skills. AI must not be used at any point during the assessment.
2	AI-ASSISTED IDEA GENERATION AND STRUCTURING	AI can be used in the assessment for brainstorming, creating structures, and generating ideas for improving work. No AI content is allowed in the final submission.
3	AI-ASSISTED EDITING	AI can be used to make improvements to the clarity or quality of student created work to improve the final output, but no new content can be created using AI. AI can be used, but your original work with no AI content must be provided in an appendix.
4	AI TASK COMPLETION, HUMAN EVALUATION	AI is used to complete certain elements of the task, with students providing discussion or commentary on the AI-generated content. This level requires critical engagement with AI generated content and evaluating its output. You will use AI to complete specified tasks in your assessment. Any AI created content must be cited.
5	FULL AI	AI should be used as a “co-pilot” in order to meet the requirements of the assessment, allowing for a collaborative approach with AI and enhancing creativity. You may use AI throughout your assessment to support your own work and do not have to specify which content is AI generated.

Table 1 The AI Assessment Scale (AIAS) adapted from Furze et al. (2024)

The AIAS consists of five levels, ranging from 'No AI' to 'Full AI', enabling educators to design assessments that focus on areas requiring human input and critical thinking. This scale exemplifies a clear framework of the use of AI tools for students, lecturers, and policy-makers in higher learning institutions. With clear written guidelines and policies for academic writing, universities can embrace the potential benefits of GAI and safeguard academic integrity. Through their governance, university leaders can encourage the judicious integration of these tools, promoting their use as tools to enhance creativity, efficiency, and intellectual exploration while simultaneously instilling ethical engagement with GAI technology at institutional level.

Therefore, using AI detection tools is an option but not a solution to maintain academic integrity. Institutional subscription to such tools means spending resources to scrutinize individual student submissions. Alternatively, institutions could evaluate if the budget is better invested in cultivating ethical foundations and educational processes that position students' growth and nurture values. It is aligned with one of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) five principal functions which is to perform the advancement, transfer and sharing of knowledge through research, training and teaching activities (Law et al., 2018). Malaysia for instance, has emphasized the aspect of education in the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 (WKB 2030) document and the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (RMKe-12) in the Malaysian Higher Education Action Plan 2022-2025 (PTPTM) because

educating students to develop their individual potentials goes hand in hand with efforts to enhance the quality of the national education system.

Theoretical and practical GAI training programs, hands-on workshops, conferences, colloquiums, forums, lectures, and value-driven academic discourse should be available and convenient for students, academicians, researchers, and experts to participate, publish, and share. These platforms allow the exchange of new and novel ideas on GAI so that the pursuit of knowledge can dynamically coexist with technological progress. In this era of university 4.0, the transformational leadership approach focuses not just on policing potential violations better, but on fostering intrinsic motivations for education aligned with the ideals of intellectual enlightenment through transformation. As suggested by Prestiadi et al. in their qualitative study in 2020, transformational leadership is done through building commitment and awareness among all stakeholders of educational institutions to actualize themselves and use technological advances, information and communication in the education process.

DISCUSSION

By equipping themselves with knowledge of GAI, university leaders will be able to apply Bloom's Taxonomy cognitive domain and the action verbs towards higher-ordered critical thinking which will result in complex innovative opportunities. The knowledge they acquire will benefit them in making informed decisions about the university's investments, infrastructure, partnerships and the improvement of pedagogical practices. These decisions will hopefully ensure that AI technology can be recognised and ethically integrated into academic work.

While the use of GAI tools can help teachers and students during lectures assignments and assessments will help foster technological adaptation and resilience, there are, however, risks where the tools can be misused. These risks warrant the use of AI detection measures to ensure academic integrity. Leaders are critical in such scenarios as they need to adjust their decision-making style based on the situation and modify their approaches based on their subordinates' participation (Vroom & Jago, 2018). For instance, the universities may set ground rules and state that AI tools may be used to proofread dissertation submissions and help generate plagiarism reports. Considering the students will eventually grow into future experts in their respective fields, they need to uphold the standards of intellectual honesty and ethical conduct. In such scenarios, the university leaders may set guidelines for AI-assisted writing to help maintain academic integrity. Implementing such measures can foster transparency and ethical conduct whilst harnessing GAI.

The university's research and publication domain can also be improved via the integration of GAI tools which are designed to accelerate research. Tools such as Elicit and Scite utilise language models and information retrieval to streamline a multi-disciplinary literature review process. These AI can rapidly synthesize and surface relevant insights by ingesting data inputs like research questions and literature, resulting in an accelerated literature review process that would traditionally require a great deal of manual effort and time. This makes GAI tools invaluable and time-saving for expanding research and publications as they can manage and arrange extracted information from many sources both coherently and efficiently. University leaders can arrange for training for researchers, academics and students to use these tools ethically, encouraging more high-impact research and innovations. This could lead to an expansion and create new, significant knowledge, make discoveries, or suggest solutions that benefit the fields of knowledge, industry, governments and society. It is the role public universities must adopt since they are mostly funded by state governments as well as by tuition fees, research grants and other sources to provide education.

Regardless of how digitalized the education landscape is, people should be the priority. Technological advancement should not cause harm to people or allow them to harm each other. Therefore, when adopting technology, human values should be embraced. University leaders can help regulate the ethical integration of GAI through governance and informed decisions. Individual compliance with university regulations will allow students, academics, researchers and scholars to comprehend the benefits and deficits of using GAI. Their compliance reflects their descriptive ethics that will help them to make the best of using GAI while avoiding any of the shortcomings at individual level. Regulations on GAI tools are utilitarian because the risks of misuse of AI-generated content can compromise academic integrity, cause misinformation and misconception, and hinder the development of critical thinking skills. GAI tools also possess inherent flaws like biases and inaccurate output.

Knowledge about the mechanism, capabilities, limitations, implications, and risks of GAI technologies is existential for university leaders in developing a well-rounded understanding and evaluations to formulate policies governing its adoption in education. Learning objectives can be updated to better prepare students to adapt, adopt, and become adept with AI in the future. Educational leaders face numerous challenges in regulating and integrating GAI technologies in academic settings which can potentially hinder the success of policies, programs, and activities related to the responsible use of GAI in education. For example, Ahmad et al. (2021) study implied that there are situations that are not ideal as expected by all parties because of constraints and challenges that encompass technological aspects among others; that may have a slightly negative impact on the success of the relevant teaching, learning, and supervision activities in universities.

GAI tools are used to generate digital content more efficiently and at a lower price in professional and business settings such as copywriting, coding, translation, marketing, relationship building, and many more. Hence, university leaders should be well-informed to describe, analyse, evaluate, and ultimately take a balanced stance in technology adoption that embed ethical values like transparency, honesty, and accountability among students. These values still apply in their future careers after they graduate. With insights into current technological limits as well as development trajectories, balanced policies can provide clear guidelines distinguishing acceptable applications from violations of academic integrity. Moreover, knowledge about data biases, privacy and intellectual property surrounding GAI tools enables provisions that address such pitfalls in drafting policies that align with the institution's strategic objectives and values.

Overall, by knowing of GAI's evolving functions and limitations in the decision-making frameworks, university leadership can responsibly steer adoption in academic and research missions. Their knowledge is the base of their decisions on university governance, which determines GAI adoption to amplify education processes. The ecosystem of university leadership, especially public universities, requires inter-layer and inter-cluster interaction of all educational environment members to embrace the digital transformation of the educational environment (Gruzina et al., 2019). This means that students, stakeholders, societies, industries, and ministries are interrelated with academia in creating, using, governing, and solving issues in GAI technological adoption. Based on this conclusion, this paper proposes a conceptual framework for the roles of GAI knowledge among university leaders in their decision-making that consists of four steps as follows:

1. Knowledge – University leaders equipped with knowledge of GAI tools as well as their nature, potential, and risks to academics.
2. Informed decision – University leaders make decisions accordingly to maximize benefit and minimize harm while safeguarding academic integrity.

3. Regulation – University leaders collaborate with relevant stakeholders and experts to formulate and implement policies and governance.
4. Ethical use of GAI– University leaders lead the top-down ethical use of GAI tools in university 4.0.

This paper identifies the roles of knowledge about GAI in decision-making among leaders in public universities from the literature review, specifically from 22 sources ranging from the year 2011 to 2024. The themes are analyzed and the concepts are developed by making clear linkages between the emerging themes (Lochmiller, 2021). The tabulation of the sources and the conceptual definitions are included in Table 2

Sources	Literature Review Theme	Category	Concept
Hauke, 2019; Waite et al., 2020; Strobel & Möller, 2024	Knowledge as an active engagement with ideas, arguments, and the surroundings. The knowledge dimension allows university leaders to progress from concrete to more abstract thinking in a construct defined by factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive knowledge. The fundamental knowledge of the taxonomy and typology of GAI tools advances our practical understanding, strengthens the distinguishability, as well as adds clarity to the discourse of GAI potential.	Knowledge	University leaders equipped with knowledge of GAI tools as well as their nature, potential, and risks to academics.
Chaka, 2023; Chaka, 2023b; Heilweil, 2022; Miller, 2023; Perkins et al., 2024	Institutional detection processes have limitations.		
Moln'ar & Szuts, 2018; Lam et al., 2018, pp. 18–19; Adamopoulou & Moussiades, 2020	AI tools have immense potential in education like increasing student engagement.		
Fezari et al., 2023; Goldstein et al., 2023	GAI enable the rapid production of realistic content for users.		

Ololube et al., 2021; Horban, 2011	Effective decision-making in higher education requires thoughtful and precise leadership, focusing on systematic planning and swift response to unanticipated situations, in this context the situation is GAI technology adoption.	Informed Decisions	University leaders make decisions accordingly to maximize benefit and minimize harm while safeguarding academic integrity.
Shao-Wei, 2011	University leaders can improve their decisiveness and promote competition and development by understanding decision processes, optimizing decision-making gravity, enhancing analytical judgments, exercising decisive quality, developing strategic thinking, and stressing democratic participation. Cost-benefit analysis might be required in this context.		
Rashid et al., 2016	Leadership decision-making is the most significant factor in strategic planning at public universities.	Regulation	University leaders collaborate with relevant stakeholders and experts to formulate and implement policies and governance.
Prestiadi et al., 2020	Transformational leadership is done through building commitment and awareness among all stakeholders of educational institutions to actualize themselves and use technological advances, information and communication in the education process.		
Gruzina et al., 2019	The ecosystem of university leadership, especially public universities, requires inter-layer and inter-cluster interaction of all educational environment members to embrace the digital transformation of the educational environment.		

Labadze et al., 2023; Vroom & Jago, 2018	Incorporating AI chatbots in education brings personalized learning for students and time efficiency for educators. Therefore, leaders need to adjust their decision-making style based on the situation and modify their approaches based on their subordinates' participation.	Ethical use of GAI	University leaders lead the top-down ethical use of GAI tools in university 4.0.
Furze et al., 2024	AI Assessment Scale (AIAS), a flexible framework for incorporating GAI into educational assessments, can be considered to be implemented among public universities based on leaders' insights.		

Table 2 Literature review table for the roles of knowledge about generative artificial intelligence (GAI) on decision-making among leaders in public universities.

This framework posits the role of knowledge as the foundation to the ethical use of GAI in higher learning institutions. In short, this framework establishes knowledge as the basis for leaders' decision-making, which contributes to regulations of GAI technology, and facilitates the ethical adoption of GAI technology in higher education.

LIMITATIONS

As a conceptual paper, this study does not provide empirical data or analysis to support its claims. The arguments and insights presented are primarily based on conceptual considerations and literature reviews, lacking direct observational or experimental evidence. While conceptual papers are valuable for exploring theoretical frameworks and generating new ideas, they may lack the practical implications and real-world applicability that empirical studies can offer. This limitation of study therefore limits the generalizability of its findings and recommendations to specific contexts or situations within public universities and higher education institutions. Since this paper can be influenced by the authors' personal interpretations, biases, and perspectives, which may introduce subjectivity in the analysis and conclusions drawn, future studies can fill this gap to support or challenge with empirical analysis. Moreover, this paper discusses the roles of GAI knowledge on decision-making from the perspectives of leaders in public universities, potentially overlooking the viewpoints and experiences of other stakeholders, such as faculty members, students, industry partners, and societal groups, who may have valuable insights on the integration of GAI in academia. Given the rapid pace of technological advancements, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence, the conceptual framework and recommendations presented in the paper may become outdated or require revisions as new developments and challenges emerge. Therefore, to address these limitations, the authors acknowledge the need for rigorous empirical case studies that can

provide real-world insights into the successful leadership that steers the ethical use of GAI in educational institutions through the era of university 4.0.

Opportunities for Future Research

This paper achieves its objective to identify the roles of GAI knowledge in university leadership decision-making that leads to the ethical use of GAI in education. Based on the literature review, there are emerging themes that are categorized into (1) knowledge, (2) informed decisions, (3) regulation, and (4) ethical use of GAI. The concepts are then developed from the linked themes. In future works, the impact of knowledge needs to be empirically examined to determine the extent to which GAI adoption and implementation in education through policy and technological interventions.

A detailed case study investigating a successful implementation of university governance measures in detecting and deterring misuse of GAI writing tools could provide valuable insight. By tracing the processes, strategies, and solutions deployed to uphold academic integrity against this new form of cheating, other universities can learn from targeted responses found to be most impactful. Additional examination is warranted to understand the structures and best practices enabling one institution to shape norms around responsible AI adoption and integration that uphold academic integrity - outcomes vital for preserving trust in emerging technologies' contributions rather than merely their disruptions across institutes of teaching, research and innovation.

By the time this paper is written, this paper identifies the lacking of GAI tools directory curated specifically for academic purposes. Educational leaders might also consider the necessity of providing a comprehensive directory of GAI tools and websites deemed appropriate and sustainable for academic utilization. Such directory would enable students and academics to access relevant resources, fostering an equitable and inclusive learning environment. This directory could categorize the available tools and websites based on their pricing models, including free, freemium (offering basic features for free with premium paid options), free trial periods, and paid subscriptions. Some of these tools might already being used in universities such as Scopus AI, Grammarly, Canva, Zoom, et cetera. Moreover, implementing a search functionality that allows students to filter resources by specific categories or academic disciplines would streamline their ability to identify the most suitable tools for their respective educational endeavours. By providing a centralized repository of vetted AI resources, educational institutions can empower students with access to GAI technologies while ensuring alignment with academic integrity standards, ethical adoption, and responsible AI practices.

Universities also can consider to appoint academic officer or consultant in human form to be in charge of the AI and GAI adoption at institutional level. The primary responsibilities of this officer include providing guidance and recommendations to the university management regarding the appropriate scope, applications, and governance frameworks for AI and GAI adoption. Moreover, they would play a crucial role in addressing inquiries and concerns from students, faculty, and other stakeholders regarding how much, how, and why AI and GAI are integrated within various academic and operational processes. This officer would be responsible for keeping up the latest discoveries, developments, best practices, and ethical considerations in the field, thereby enabling the institution to navigate the complexities and potential challenges associated with AI. This initiative would not only promote technological literacy but also encourage the ethical and effective integration of AI in various academic pursuits, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of education. Therefore, university leaders can engage student representatives, AI experts from academia and industry, as well as

government ministries to collaboratively develop comprehensive policies for ethical use of GAI in higher learning institutions.

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE SPRATLY ISLANDS DISPUTE FROM A NEOCLASSICAL REALIST PERSPECTIVE DURING THE PRIME MINISTER NAJIB BIN RAZAK ERA (2009-2018) IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: This study discusses the dispute over the overlapping claims on the Spratly islands during the administration of Najib Razak's 2009-2018. The island is claimed by six countries including Malaysia. Malaysia has put its official claim since 1979 with issuance of Peta Baharu (the New Map). Since then, Malaysia has continued to strengthen its claim over the area. Malaysia has used a range of strategic moves to strengthen its position in the Spratly Islands in the face of conflicting claims. Engaging diplomatically with regional and international parties to gain support for its territorial claims has been one noteworthy tactic. In addition, Malaysia has worked to strengthen its de facto authority over these areas by fortifying its presence on important features through marine patrols and infrastructure development. But there have been a number of issues involving China and the United States of America in the area. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to provide light on Malaysia's strategy, particularly during the Najib Razak administration. It is critical to comprehend how Malaysia manages the situation by pursuing its national interest in the region while simultaneously keeping positive relationships with China and the United States of America. In doing so, the neo-classical realism perspective is employed to better explain the dynamics of Malaysia's approach during Najib's era visa-vis balancing its ties with China and the United States, without sacrificing its interest in claiming the Spratly islands.

Keywords: *Spratly, Neo-Classical Realism, Najib Razak*

INTRODUCTION

The issue of territorial disputes in the South China Sea (SCS) has the potential to erupt into a more significant battle, involving the United States, primarily interested in preserving freedom of passage in the SCS. Malaysia first staked its claim to the Spratly Islands in 1979. Several other countries, including China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, and Taiwan, have also staked claims to the Spratlys since then. The area is strategically located and thought to be abundant in valuable natural resources, making it valuable for both military and economic purposes. Tensions and incidents have arisen because of overlapping claims, and diplomatic efforts to resolve the dispute have failed. International organizations and major powers are actively engaged to manage and resolve the issue, but so far, no conclusive resolution has been reached (Rizal and Rafiq, 2014). While Prime Minister Najib Razak was in office, commerce, tourism, investment, and other fields greatly benefited from the close connections established between Malaysia and China. However, tensions between the two countries had arisen over territorial disputes in the SCS involving the disputed Spratly Islands. Despite these obstacles, factors such as economic interdependence and diplomatic approaches have helped to ease tensions in Malaysia and China's relationship. This paper applies the neoclassical realism framework to analyze how these strategies have helped to reduce tension and discuss the progress in the Spratly Islands dispute during the Prime Minister Najib bin Razak administration.

The Spratly Islands dispute is a highly complex issue due to the multiple countries involved and their competing claims to the islands and surrounding waters. The nine-dash line is a U-shaped line seen on South China Sea (SCS) maps that China uses to claim sovereignty over the Spratly Islands. The Republic of China (ROC), which controlled mainland China until 1949, initially drew the line on a map in 1947. When the PRC took control, it inherited the ROC's claim.

The issue of the nine-dash line intersects with numerous other nations' claims, including Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. These countries have all accused China of infringing on their sovereignty by constructing artificial islands and military bases in the South China Sea. The nine-dash line issue is a prominent source of tension in the South China Sea. The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) found in 2016 that China's claims to the Spratly Islands were unconstitutional. However, China has refused to recognize the verdict and has increased its military presence in the region. The nine-dash line disagreement is a complicated problem with no simple solution (Jalil, et al., 2022). The nations concerned have various historical claims to the Spratly Islands, and there is no clear international law defining who has sovereignty over the islands. The fact that the Spratly Islands are located in a strategically important location with abundant natural resources complicates the conflict even further. The nine-dash line issue poses a significant threat to SCS peace and stability. If their claims are not honored, the countries concerned have all vowed to employ force (Idris and Abdullah, 2022).

MALAYSIA AND THE SPRATLY ISLANDS ISSUE

Although the bilateral relationship between Malaysia and China has had a positive impact on the development of both countries, especially in the economic sector, the relationship is also often strained due to issues that arise. For example, the issue of territorial overlapping in the Spratly Islands involving Kuala Lumpur and Beijing has to some extent become a challenge for both countries to maintain a harmonious and stable relationship status, especially in the long term. If these issues are not managed well, of course Malaysia's relationship as a

developing country with China, which is the world's economic giant, will be affected. Additionally, if this matter is not addressed by Malaysia through a proactive approach, it will certainly affect Malaysia's opportunity to promote economic cooperation through trade and investment with China at a higher level (Idris and Abdullah, 2022).

This study will analyze the strategy and role taken by Malaysia during the era of Prime Minister Najib Razak's administration, employing the Neo-Classical Realism approach as outlined by Kuik (2012). Neo-Classical Realism provides a framework that combines the insights of classical realism, which emphasizes the influence of human nature and domestic factors on state behavior, with the structural constraints emphasized by neo-realism. This approach is particularly relevant in understanding how Malaysia navigated the complexities of international relations and regional tensions during this period. From the study's problems, the main research question arises: What strategies helped to reduce tension and discuss the progress in the Spratly Islands dispute during Prime Minister Najib Razak's administration? This question aims to uncover the specific diplomatic, economic, and military strategies that Malaysia employed to manage and potentially mitigate the longstanding territorial dispute in the South China Sea, particularly concerning the Spratly Islands.

Under Najib Razak's leadership, Malaysia faced the challenge of balancing its national interests with the need to maintain regional stability and good relations with neighboring countries, including China. The study will explore how Malaysia's foreign policy and strategic decisions were influenced by internal and external factors, such as domestic political considerations, economic dependencies, and the broader geopolitical environment. By examining these strategies, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of Malaysia's approach to the Spratly Islands dispute, highlighting the successes and limitations of Najib Razak's administration in navigating this complex international issue.

THEORETICAL PERSEPECTIVE

Neoclassical realism is a complex theory that sheds light on how governments conduct their foreign policies in the context of contemporary maritime warfare. It can help us explain why states act in specific ways and forecast how they could react to new threats. Some contemporary maritime conflicts are explained here using examples from neoclassical realism. For instance, China's aggressiveness in the South China Sea (SCS) may be understood in light of the country's rising strength and the need to protect China's maritime interests. Nevertheless, the reactions of other governments in the area and the international community limit China's capacity to fulfill its aims. To prevent China from using force to enforce its claims in the SCS, the United States has taken measures to discourage China from doing so. The U.S. is acting to counter China's expanding influence and safeguard American interests. Japan is another example. Due to concerns about China's expanding maritime strength, she has recently been boosting her military budget. Japan has taken these measures to prevent China from employing force against Japan or its friends in the area. When applied to studying state behavior in international relations and modern maritime conflict, neoclassical realism is invaluable. It can help us explain why states act in specific ways and forecast how they could react to new threats.

The goal of neoclassical realism, a school of thought in international relations, is to explain the actions of governments in the realm of foreign policy. It posits that nations are driven by the need to maintain their existence and expand their power but are limited in both endeavors by factors at home and abroad. Neoclassical realism is both a theory of international relations and a method for analyzing foreign policy. Gideon Rose first coined the term in a 1998 *World Politics Review* article. It combines classical realist and neorealist theories, particularly defensive realist theories.

Neoclassical realists contend that the distribution of power in the international system is a significant determinant of state behavior, but that this behavior is also influenced by domestic factors such as political institutions, economic resources, and public opinion. In other words, neoclassical realists believe that states are not merely passive actors in the international system but can influence their destinies by considering the domestic constraints and opportunities they face (Jalil, et al, 2022).

Neoclassical realism has been used to explain various foreign policy behaviors, such as the rise of China, the US invasion of Iraq, and the European Union's response to the Ukrainian crisis. One of the most critical insights of neoclassical realism is that the distribution of power in the international system is not always an accurate predictor of state behavior. The United States, despite being the most powerful nation in the world, has not always acted in a hegemonic manner. Domestic factors, including the public's aversion to war and the separation of powers, have constrained the United States. According to a fundamental insight of neoclassical realism, states are not always rational actors. They may base their decisions on emotion, ideology, or misunderstandings. For example, the U.S. invasion of Iraq was predicated on the false belief that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. Neoclassical realism is an approach to international relations theory that combines realist and liberal perspectives. This makes it a more realistic and nuanced theory than realism or liberalism alone as it applies to a broader spectrum of situations and accurately reflects the world.

One advantage of neoclassical realism is that it is a more realistic approach than realism. Realism posits that states are always motivated by power and security and will always act in their self-interest. However, neoclassical realism acknowledges that domestic factors such as public opinion, ideology, and bureaucratic politics influence states. Therefore, neoclassical realism is a more accurate reflection of the actual world. Additionally, it is more complex than progressivism. Neoclassical realism recognizes that states are also motivated by power and security and will occasionally act in ways that are contrary to the interests of other states. Thus, neoclassical realism is a more nuanced and realistic international relations theory that applies to a wider range of situations. Concerning the essence of the international system, both realism and liberalism are based on assumptions. The premise of realism is that the international system is anarchic, and states are always motivated by power and security. Liberalism presupposes that the international system is becoming increasingly interdependent and that states can cooperate to accomplish shared objectives. However, these assumptions do not hold in every circumstance. Neoclassical realism posits that the international system is a mixture of anarchy and order, and states are motivated by power, security, and domestic factors. This makes neoclassical realism applicable to a broader spectrum of situations (Idris and Abdullah, 2022).

However, it is also deemed to be too intricate. Neoclassical realism is a complex theory that requires an in-depth knowledge of the international system and the domestic politics of the state in question. This can make it challenging to apply the theory to instances. It cannot make accurate predictions (Kuik, 2012). The midrange theory of neoclassical realism does not make precise predictions about state behavior. This is because it acknowledges that the behavior of states is influenced by multiple factors, such as the distribution of power in the international system, the domestic politics of the state, and the personalities of the state's leaders. It is sometimes apparent how to quantify domestic factors influencing state behavior. Neoclassical realism contends that domestic factors that influence state behavior are significant, but how to measure them is only sometimes obvious (Kuik, 2012).

This can make it difficult to verify the theory empirically. Neoclassical realism and hedging are closely related. Neoclassical realism argues that states will hedge when they perceive that the international system is inhospitable or when they face multiple threats. Hedging allows states to avoid making commitments that could lead to conflict and to preserve their options if the situation changes. Hedging may take various forms. States can hedge by

building up their military capabilities, by strengthening their alliances, or by engaging in economic diplomacy. The specific form of hedging that a state chooses will depend on the specific circumstances facing the state. Hedging is a complex and nuanced strategy. It can be challenging to implement successfully and carries a degree of risk. Nevertheless, hedging can be an effective way for states to protect their interests in a complex and uncertain world.

Despite these flaws, neoclassical realism continues to play a significant role in the study of international relations. It provides a valuable framework for comprehending the complex interaction between systemic and domestic factors that influence state behavior. To understand the actions of governments fighting for maritime territory and resources in the contemporary era, neoclassical realism may be helpful. For example, China's growing aggressiveness in the South China Sea is a manifestation of its expanding strength and the country's efforts to protect its maritime interests. However, the reactions of other governments in the area and the international community limit China's capacity to fulfill its aims. Even when governments are not directly involved in maritime conflicts, neoclassical realism can help explain their behavior. The United States, for instance, has taken measures to discourage China from employing force to press for its rights in the South China Sea, where free passage is vital. The United States of America is acting to counter China's expanding influence and safeguard American interests (Ridzuan, et al., 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several issues that Malaysia and other countries must take into account in order to maintain stability in their bilateral relations with China. Dollah and Hassan (2005) found that there are several issues on which Malaysia and other countries have agendas that have not yet been resolved with China, such as economic issues, security issues in the South China Sea, China's transparency in its military development, provocative issues, and China's military actions against other countries. These issues arise because of the negative perception of ASEAN countries towards China. This situation occurs as a result of the concept of "asymmetrical multilateralism" in the relationship between ASEAN and China. This is because the difference in China's capabilities from military, economic, or social aspects can invite risk perception and attention and change the interaction behavior among ASEAN countries, especially Malaysia. The disagreement has been more contentious in recent years. China has made the most assertive claims, and its military presence in the area is the largest. Therefore, the other claimants are worried that China will try to dominate the whole South China Sea. The South China Sea dispute has become a major source of tension in the Asia-Pacific region, with multiple countries and their conflicting claims over the islands and waters in the region. The area is also an important shipping lane, connecting Asia to Europe and Africa, making it a crucial economic and strategic waterway.

The international community has been closely monitoring the situation, and there have been efforts to resolve the dispute through diplomatic and legal means, including the ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague in 2016. In a formal tone, the issue remains unresolved and continues to cause tensions in the region. The involvement of major powers such as the United States has added another layer of complexity to the situation, making it difficult to find a resolution that is acceptable to all parties involved. The ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague in 2016, which was in favor of the Philippines and invalidated China's claims to most of the South China Sea, including the Spratly Islands, was a significant development in the dispute. However, despite the legal victory, the Philippines has been unable to enforce the ruling due to China's refusal to recognize the decision. China has continued to assert its claims over the area and has increased its military presence and construction activities in the disputed islands. Additionally, other countries with

claims in the South China Sea, such as Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei, have also continued to assert their claims, further complicating the situation. The lack of a unified stance among the affected countries has made it difficult to find a diplomatic solution to the dispute. Furthermore, the South China Sea is a critical region for global trade and has abundant natural resources, including oil and gas reserves, making it a highly valued and sought-after area. This has further complicated efforts to resolve the conflict as multiple countries have vested interests in the region (Bentley, 2023).

With the addition of other countries, such as Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei, continuing to assert their claims in the South China Sea (SCS), the situation has become further complicated. The lack of a unified stance among the affected countries has made it difficult to find a diplomatic solution to the dispute. Moreover, the SCS is a critical region for global trade and has abundant natural resources, including oil and gas reserves, making it a highly valuable and sought-after area. This has further complicated efforts to resolve the conflict as multiple countries have vested interests in the region. Nonetheless, there is no simple answer to the conflict over the Spratly Islands to-date (Idris and Abdullah, 2022).

The Spratly Islands dispute, which encompasses conflicting territorial claims, the presence of valuable resources, and the refusal of some parties to accept the legal ruling, has made it challenging to find a lasting solution through diplomatic and legal means. Malaysia's claim over the Spratly Islands dates to 1979, when the Malaysian government officially submitted a claim to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (UNCLOS) to extend its continental shelf to include the islands. Consequently, Malaysia's claim over the Spratly Islands is based on both technical and legal grounds, as stipulated by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Bentley, 2023).

UNCLOS, adopted in 1982 and entering into force in 1994, establishes a legal framework for the use and conservation of the world's oceans and their resources. Under UNCLOS, coastal states have the right to claim an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) extending 200 nautical miles from their coast, in which they have special rights to explore and exploit the natural resources, including the seabed and subsoil. In accordance with UNCLOS, Malaysia has submitted a claim to extend its continental shelf to include the Spratly Islands. This claim is based on the fact that the islands are located within Malaysia's EEZ and are therefore considered to be a natural extension of the country's continental shelf. To date, Malaysia has laid claims to Swallow Reef, as well as Investigator Shoal (Beting Peninjau), Erica Reef (Terumbu Sirut), Mariveles Reef (Terumbu Mantanani), Ardasier Reef (Terumbu Ubi), North Luconia Shoal (Beting Raja Jarum), and South Luconia Shoal (Beting Patinggi Ali). James Shoal (Beting Serupai), Commodore Reef (Terumbu Laksamana), Amboyna Cay (Permatang Amboyna Kecil), and Barque Canada Reef (Terumbu Mascado) are all located within Malaysia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) (Bentley, 2023).

Malaysia has also submitted evidence to support its claim, including geological and geophysical data, which shows that the Spratly Islands are part of the same geological formation as Malaysia's continental shelf. This evidence supports Malaysia's argument that the islands are a natural extension of its continental shelf and therefore should be recognized as part of its territory. The Spratly Islands are located in the South China Sea and are believed to be rich in natural resources, including oil and gas reserves (Kuik, 2013; Lai, et al, 2021). The close proximity of the islands to Malaysia and their potential resource wealth makes them a valuable and strategic area for the country. In addition to its natural resources, the Spratly Islands also have strategic significance for Malaysia as they are located near important shipping lanes and serve as a potential military outpost. Control over the islands would allow Malaysia to better protect its territorial waters and improve its maritime security. In addition, Malaysia has a long history of fishing and trading in the area and has consistently maintained that the Spratly Islands are part of its traditional fishing grounds (Lai, et al, 2021; Lai, et al, 2023). This

historical connection, combined with the strategic and economic importance of the islands, has reinforced Malaysia's claim over the Spratly Islands. Essentially, Malaysia's claim over the Spratly Islands is based on a combination of strategic, economic, and historical factors (Bentley, 2023). The country views the islands as a valuable and integral part of its territory and has made sustained efforts to assert its claim through diplomatic means and by increasing its presence in the area.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative method of secondary sources through content analysis of journal articles, theses, books, and online resources to explore and understand the topic undertaken. Qualitative approaches rely on first-hand accounts and experiences. The information collected through this approach is typically unstructured yet comprehensive. Information from secondary sources may be available in a wide variety of published works and online resources.

Each subject or subtopic in this scientific writing requires its own unique set of data, which is gathered and used as reference materials and information. Secondary sources are documents that have been written by someone other than the researcher. They can include books, articles, reports and government documents. Secondary sources are used to provide background information on a topic, to identify key actors and events and to understand the different perspectives on an issue (Klotz, et al., 2008). By analyzing secondary sources, researchers can gain insights into the motivations and decision-making processes of states and identify the key factors that shape international outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on these findings, the strategy adopted by Prime Minister Najib Razak's government (2009-2018) in dealing with China on the Spratly Islands issue comprises several key components. Malaysia endeavored to bolster its relationships with other claimants to the Spratly Islands, such as the Philippines and Vietnam, through joint military exercises and diplomatic cooperation, fostering a sense of unity and collective security among the Southeast Asian nations involved. Additionally, Malaysia pursued international arbitration to resolve the disputes over the Spratly Islands. In 2013, Malaysia filed a case with the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague, reflecting its commitment to a rules-based international order and peaceful dispute resolution, with the PCA expected to issue a ruling on the case in 2016. Despite the disputes, Malaysia also sought to work collaboratively with China. In 2009, Malaysia and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the management of fishing activities in the South China Sea, which was renewed in 2014, highlighting Malaysia's pragmatic approach to maintaining constructive bilateral relations while addressing contentious issues.

The strategy adopted by Prime Minister Najib Razak's government can be analyzed through the lens of neoclassical realism theory. Neoclassical realism is a middle-ground approach to international relations theory that combines the insights of both realism and liberalism, providing a nuanced and realistic framework for understanding international interactions by considering both the influence of domestic factors and the constraints imposed by the international system. By applying neoclassical realism, it becomes clear that Najib Razak's government attempted to balance the power of China through a combination of strengthening regional alliances, seeking legal avenues for dispute resolution, and maintaining

bilateral cooperation. This multifaceted strategy reflects a sophisticated approach to managing complex international relations and protecting national interests (Omar, 2006).

By strengthening ties with other claimants, Malaysia is attempting to increase its own power and to deter China from taking any aggressive action. By seeking international arbitration, Malaysia is trying to gain the support of the international community and to legitimize its claims to the Spratly Islands. By working with China, Malaysia is trying to avoid conflict with China and to find a peaceful resolution to the dispute (Idris and Abdullah, 2022). The neoclassical realist analytical lens used in this study frames structural variables as shifts in the relative power and commitments of the world's major powers, which in turn create systemic pressures and opportunities that can make or break the survival prospects of a smaller state in a more decentralized system. This idea goes beyond the neorealist view of international structure in three key respects. First, structural elements are not just potential dangers and difficulties; they also have the potential to deliver positive outcomes. Second, a state's physical circumstances (security), economic foundations (prosperity), and political foundations (sovereignty and policy flexibility) can all be affected by structural causes. Structural factors are not just the result of a shift in the relative power of states; they are also shaped by unknown factors and changes that they bring. There are benefits to being courted by competing powers, such as tangible rewards and the shadow cast by the unknown intentions of the great powers, but there is also the risk of becoming entangled in a conflict between the great powers and the risk of being banned as a result. When such structural elements have a more significant impact, a state is more vulnerable due to factors including its size, location, and international characteristics.

A more nuanced understanding of structural factors sheds light on the policy trade-offs faced by smaller states in response to uncertainty and system-level changes at the systemic level. Smaller governments are invariably confronted with a policy trilemma due to their inherent vulnerability and the need to seek external support to address existential threats. It is imperative to recognize that there are limitations to achieving all policy goals simultaneously, and a weak state must prioritize some objectives over others (Idris and Abdullah, 2022). Regardless of the external aid option chosen by a state (e.g., a great power, neighboring nations, or international agencies), relying solely on that option to mitigate threats results in additional risks and challenges. Although a smaller state may benefit economically and militarily by aligning with a larger power's alliance (through development aid and utilizing the security umbrella to channel resources towards domestic development), it also faces the risk of domestic opposition, undermined sovereignty, and domination by the larger power (Kuik, 2012; Farzana et al., 2019). In making foreign policy judgments, smaller states may need to choose between two less-than-ideal options, forcing them to prioritize their goals and assess the risks involved. It is reasonable to assume that a weak state will prioritize some policy goals over others due to the unrealistic nature of expecting it to achieve all objectives with a single act.

It is prudent for an actor to evaluate the costs and advantages of each alternative and select the one with the lowest risk and expense, given that it is uncertain whether a small state can achieve its objectives optimally without exposing itself to certain hazards. Consequently, the ultimate policy decision made by a state usually reflects its priority goals, including the risks and trade-offs it is willing to take (Hamzah, 2021). It is widely acknowledged that the forces governing the relations between Malaysia and China are not solely influenced by structural elements but are instead the outcome of international circumstances. This is largely due to the efforts of Prime Minister Najib bin Razak to build upon the solid foundation that he inherited from his predecessor. Since the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA) went into effect on January 1, 2010, the administration of Najib bin Razak has overseen a rapid and comprehensive growth in Malaysia's commercial relations with China. Since 2009, China has replaced Singapore, Japan, and the United States as Malaysia's most significant trading partner,

leaving those countries behind in the process. In 2011, the sum of all goods and services exchanged between the two countries reached a new all-time high of US\$90 billion, with Malaysia reaping an enormous trade surplus of US\$30 billion. China overtook Singapore as Malaysia's largest export destination in the same year, surpassing Singapore in the rankings. Palm oil was among China's most lucrative exports, alongside semiconductors and other commodities related to information technology. It is anticipated that two-way trade would amount to a total of \$100 billion in the year 2012. Pragmatism in economics serves as the guiding principle for Prime Minister Najib's China policy, which aims to increase Chinese investment in Malaysia and strengthen commercial connections between the two countries.

Since the appointment of Najib bin Razak as Prime Minister in April 2009, Malaysia has maintained strong diplomatic and strategic ties with China. This was reinforced by a working expedition to China by the Commander of the Malaysian Defence Forces, General Abdul Aziz Zainal, at the request of his Chinese counterpart, General Chen Bingde, in July 2009. The commitment to strengthening strategic and cooperative ties between the two countries was further solidified during Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to Malaysia in November 2011 to celebrate the 35th anniversary of diplomatic relations. During this visit, Malaysian and Chinese leaders agreed to strengthen their strategic and cooperative ties. In December 2011, the Malaysian Minister of Defence, Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, and his Chinese counterpart, General Liang Guanglie, agreed to increase pragmatic military cooperation. Najib bin Razak also met with the Chinese State Councillor and Minister of Public Security, Meng Jianzhu, in February 2012, to discuss ways to strengthen connections between the two countries in the fight against transnational crime. These initiatives demonstrate Malaysia's commitment to maintaining strong diplomatic and strategic ties with China.

The current level of military collaboration between Malaysia and China is predominantly political and operational in nature, rather than strategic. Nevertheless, these developments can be regarded as positive progress considering the previous state of Malaysia-China security ties. To achieve their common goal of expanding and institutionalizing East Asian cooperation, the two countries' foreign policies should work together more actively and concretely than in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This may be due to the focus of the Najib's administration on internal issues rather than specific policy decisions. Despite the discussed development in bilateral ties, Malaysia's China policy under Najib's administration remained dominated by a "hedging" posture. While Malaysia may be eager to strengthen bilateral ties with China, this does not mean that it suddenly backs a regional order controlled by Beijing. Malaysia's strategic priorities remain fixed on countering the rise of a single superpower in Southeast Asia. This is demonstrated by the country's commitment to maintaining a neutral position towards all major nations and its emphasis on sovereignty equality. The Najib bin Razak government's strategy has been met with mixed results (Farzana, et al., 2019). On the one hand, the government has been able to strengthen its ties with other claimants and seek international arbitration. On the other hand, the government has not been able to reach a resolution with China. The dispute over the Spratly Islands is likely to continue to be a major challenge for Malaysia in the years to come.

In addition to the previously mentioned measures, Najib Razak's government took several further steps to address the Spratly Islands issue. Malaysia increased its defense spending in recent years to deter China from any aggressive actions in the South China Sea. The government also enhanced its maritime surveillance capabilities to better monitor Chinese activities in the region. Furthermore, Malaysia promoted economic cooperation with China to mitigate the risk of conflict between the two countries. A notable example of this is Malaysia's enthusiastic participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a multi-trillion-dollar infrastructure investment program aimed at connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe. Malaysia

signed several agreements with China to be part of the BRI, reflecting its commitment to economic collaboration.

Additionally, Malaysia adopted a quiet diplomacy approach in managing the Spratly Islands issue. This strategy involved avoiding public statements or provocative actions that could escalate the dispute, as outlined by Kuik (2012; 2013). Instead, Malaysia focused on building trust and fostering cooperation with other claimants such as the Philippines and Vietnam. It also sought resolution through international arbitration, filing a case with the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague in 2013. The PCA was expected to issue a ruling on the case in 2016. Despite these efforts, some critics argue that the quiet diplomacy approach may have been too passive (Idris and Abdullah, 2022).

In any case, Malaysia has argued that its approach is necessary to protect its interests in the SCS. As a smaller country compared to China, Malaysia does not have the military power to challenge China's claims to the Spratly Islands. Therefore, Malaysia believes it is in its best interest to avoid provoking China and focus on building trust and cooperation with other claimants. The quiet diplomacy approach has had some success. Malaysia has built trust and cooperation with other claimants to the Spratly Islands. In addition, the PCG case is still ongoing, and there is a possibility that the PCG will rule in favour of Malaysia. However, the quiet diplomacy approach also has its risks. If China becomes more assertive in its claims to the Spratly Islands, Malaysia may be forced to take more proactive measures to protect its interests. In other words, Malaysia's quiet diplomacy approach is a practical approach that is designed to protect Malaysia's interests in the SCS (Farzana, et al. 2019).

The approach has achieved some success, but it also carries risks. Only time will tell whether the quiet diplomacy approach will ultimately resolve the Spratly Islands dispute. Potential areas of attention for future diplomatic research on the issue of Malaysia-China strategic engagement towards a solution of the Spratly Islands dispute include the conflict's historical context, the many competing claims of the claimants, and Malaysia's and China's long-term regional goals (Hamzah, 2021; Ridzuan, et al, 2022). It is also suggested that research be conducted in the future on the possibility of a completely peaceful ending to the dispute. Such research has the potential to educate politicians and the public on the difficulties of finding a peaceful and lasting solution to the Spratly Islands issue (Kuik, 2012; Kuik, 2013).

CONCLUSION

In summary, Malaysia's approach to the Spratly Islands issue can be understood as a neoclassical realist balancing act between safeguarding Malaysian interests and maintaining peace with other claimants, particularly China. According to the tenets of neoclassical realism, the international power balance and a country's domestic interests and perceptions of national capabilities are just two of the many elements that influence a country's foreign policy decisions. Malaysia has taken a cautious stance in the Spratly Islands conflict in order to protect its territorial claims and sovereign rights as well as maintain friendly relations with China, its main trading partner. Avoiding public confrontations and instead looking to address disagreements via private conversations, Malaysia has adopted a policy of "quiet diplomacy" in its dealings with China. Malaysia has been working to improve its position in the South China Sea by increasing its military might and collaborating on economic projects with other claimants. Nevertheless, the Najib bin Razak government's strategy on the Spratly Islands issue has been criticized by some for being too accommodating to China. Nevertheless, the government has argued that its strategy is necessary to protect Malaysia's interests in the South China Sea. Malaysia's position on the Spratly Islands dispute may be understood as an effort to strike a compromise between its national interests and the constraints of the international

system. Malaysia's approach to protecting its interests while avoiding open conflict with China has been one of low-key diplomacy and collaboration with other claimants. This strategy is in line with neoclassical realism theory, which places equal weight on external and internal influences on a nation's foreign policy.

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ULASAN BUKU MEDIASI DALAM PERKEMBANGAN NOVEL SABAH KARYA ASMIATY AMAT

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PENDAHULUAN

Buku *Mediasi dalam Perkembangan Novel Sabah* oleh Asmiaty Amat adalah karya akademik penting yang membincangkan bagaimana faktor sosial, budaya, dan institusi mempengaruhi perkembangan novel di Sabah. Dengan pendekatan konsep mediasi, buku ini mengkaji hubungan kompleks antara pengarang, masyarakat, dan teks, menjadikannya rujukan utama untuk sastera Malaysia, khususnya dalam konteks Sabah.

Sabah, sebuah negeri dengan lebih daripada 41 etnik, mempunyai sejarah dan budaya yang unik. Kepelbagaian ini mencipta naratif yang mencerminkan pelbagai identiti dan nilai yang signifikan. Buku ini menonjolkan bagaimana pengarang Sabah menggunakan latar ini untuk menghasilkan karya yang tidak hanya menghiburkan tetapi juga berfungsi sebagai dokumentasi sosial.

MENGAPA BUKU INI PENTING?

Salah satu sumbangan besar buku ini ialah penekanan terhadap sastera sebagai alat untuk memahami perubahan sosial dan budaya. Sabah, dengan latar belakang sejarah dan politiknya, telah melalui pelbagai transformasi yang mempengaruhi struktur masyarakat dan seni. Buku ini merakamkan bagaimana perubahan tersebut diterjemahkan ke dalam karya sastera.

Sebagai contoh, Asmiaty menggariskan bahawa novel Sabah adalah refleksi masyarakat, memuatkan isu-isu seperti pembangunan, identiti etnik, dan konflik budaya. Penulis juga menunjukkan bagaimana adat resam dan kepercayaan masyarakat setempat menjadi asas naratif, mencerminkan usaha pengarang untuk mengimbangi pandangan seni mereka dengan realiti sosial.

RINGKASAN KANDUNGAN BUKU

Bab 1: Integrasi dan Mediasi Pembentukan Novel

Bab ini menjelaskan konsep mediasi sebagai pendekatan sosiologi untuk memahami pengaruh pelbagai faktor terhadap penghasilan novel. Penulis menggariskan hubungan antara teknologi percetakan, penyebaran karya, dan perubahan sosial yang mempengaruhi kandungan teks. Sebagai contoh, pengarang tempatan sering menggunakan adat dan kepercayaan masyarakat untuk menghasilkan tema dan naratif yang dekat dengan pembaca mereka.

Bab 2: Latar Belakang dan Sosiopolitik Penduduk Sabah

Bab ini menyentuh tentang latar belakang sosial dan politik Sabah. Penduduknya yang terdiri daripada pelbagai etnik, termasuk Bajau, Kadazandusun, dan Murut, membawa pelbagai perspektif ke dalam novel mereka. Penulis menekankan bahawa migrasi besar-besaran dari Indonesia dan Filipina sejak tahun 1980-an juga mempengaruhi tema-tema tertentu, seperti perpaduan dan identiti.

Selain itu, penulis memperincikan bagaimana kepercayaan animisme dan tradisi lisan mempengaruhi naratif novel, menjadikan ia lebih kaya dan berakar umbi dalam budaya tempatan. Sejarah politik Sabah juga dilihat sebagai faktor penting, dengan naratif yang sering mencerminkan perjuangan untuk membentuk identiti negeri ini.

Bab 3: Peranan Institusi dan Pengaruhnya

Institusi seperti Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), BAHASA, dan GAPURA memainkan peranan penting dalam perkembangan sastera Sabah. Aktiviti seperti pertandingan menulis, bengkel, dan seminar menyediakan platform kepada penulis muda. Sebagai contoh, penulis wanita seperti Azmah Nordin berjaya menonjolkan suara mereka melalui karya yang dihasilkan selepas mendapat bimbingan institusi ini.

Bab ini juga meneroka bagaimana mediasi institusi mempengaruhi tema dan kualiti novel. Sebagai contoh, beberapa karya ditolak kerana tidak memenuhi garis panduan tertentu, sementara yang lain disunting untuk mematuhi norma budaya dan ideologi.

Bab 4: Perkembangan Awal Penulisan Novel Sabah

Penulis menelusuri sejarah perkembangan novel Sabah dari dekad 1970-an hingga 2018. Novel pertama, *Cerah* oleh Ismail Abbas, membuka jalan kepada genre ini di Sabah. Pada dekad 1980-an, karya seperti *Pungkad* oleh Ruhaini Matdarin mula mendapat perhatian melalui peraduan yang dianjurkan institusi agama dan DBP.

Dekad 1990-an menyaksikan kemuncak penghasilan novel Sabah dengan pelbagai tema seperti pembangunan dan kemiskinan. Namun, pada awal 2000-an, berlaku kemerosotan dalam penghasilan novel, sebelum kebangkitan semula pada tahun 2010-an dengan kemunculan penulis baharu.

Bab 5: Peranan Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP)

Bab ini mengupas secara mendalam peranan DBP dalam membimbing penulis Sabah. Melalui program seperti bengkel dan pertandingan, DBP membantu meningkatkan kualiti penulisan dan memperkenalkan penulis tempatan ke peringkat kebangsaan. Contohnya, karya seperti *Rungkaian Kasih* dan *Pungkad* dihasilkan dengan bantuan mediasi DBP, menjadikan ia lebih matang dan relevan.

Bab 6: Mediasi Konvensi Sastera, Budaya, dan Ideologi

Bab ini membincangkan bagaimana adat resam, norma sosial, dan ideologi membentuk naratif dan struktur novel Sabah. Contohnya, isu seperti kemiskinan, pembangunan, dan adat tradisi sering menjadi tema utama. Novel seperti *Hijrah* dan *Dari Dalam Cermin* mencerminkan bagaimana pengarang menggunakan naratif mereka untuk menyampaikan mesej sosial dan moral kepada pembaca.

Penulis juga menyentuh tentang bagaimana mediasi budaya dan konvensi sastera menjadi panduan bagi pengarang untuk mengekalkan elemen tempatan dalam karya mereka.

Bab 7: Penutup

Bab terakhir merumuskan bahawa perkembangan novel Sabah adalah hasil daripada integrasi elemen sejarah, budaya, dan institusi. Penulis menekankan bahawa novel Sabah tidak hanya sekadar karya seni tetapi juga dokumen sosial yang mencerminkan aspirasi dan cabaran masyarakat.

GOLONGAN SASARAN PEMBACA

Buku ini relevan kepada pelajar, penyelidik, dan pensyarah dalam bidang sastera, budaya, dan sejarah. Ia juga sesuai untuk penggiat seni dan penulis yang ingin memahami bagaimana faktor sosial dan budaya membentuk naratif sastera di Sabah.

Bagi pembaca umum, buku ini menawarkan pandangan baharu tentang kekayaan budaya Sabah melalui perspektif sastera. Ia membuka peluang kepada pembaca untuk memahami Sabah bukan hanya sebagai negeri tetapi juga sebagai entiti budaya yang kompleks.

KESIMPULAN

Mediasi dalam Perkembangan Novel Sabah adalah karya yang signifikan dalam landskap sastera Malaysia. Dengan pendekatan integrasi sosial dan seni, buku ini memberikan penghargaan mendalam terhadap peranan sastera sebagai refleksi masyarakat. Ia adalah bacaan wajib untuk mereka yang ingin memahami dan menghargai sumbangan Sabah dalam kesusasteraan kebangsaan.

Buku ini boleh didapati secara dalam talian menerusi laman sesawang Penerbit UMS <https://www.ums.edu.my/penerbitv2/> atau di platform e-dagang <https://shopee.com.my/MEDIASI-DALAM-PERKEMBANGAN-NOVEL-SABAH-%28UMS-PRESS%29-i.222448301.21682840629>.