

Keynote Speeches



Democratising pedagogy through autoethnography, collaboration and arts-based methodologies

Professor Kitrina Douglas

This presentation is about how we build the type of relationships that dismantle traditional power dynamics in academia; between faculty, between researchers and participants and between teachers and their students, such that we move towards a democratised pedagogy, always cognisant of the challenges of this. The story is told in four acts. Act One offers a scene-setting journey to becoming a supervisor and giving lectures, focusing on the kinds of events and interactions that can lead to questioning tradition and expectation. Act Two shows how forming a research group, introducing students to autoethnography and arts-based research can make a profound difference to students and their lives beyond particular courses. Act Three explores some of the epiphanies and insights that emerged during group supervision through stories, emails and reflections while Act Four offers some closing reflections.

Bio-Note

Professor Kitrina Douglas is an award-winning researcher renowned for her pioneering work at the intersection of narrative inquiry, arts-based methodologies, and mental health. A former elite athlete turned academic, she holds a PhD from the University of Bristol and currently serves as Professor of Narrative and Performative Research at the University of West London.

Her work spans the social sciences, humanities, and creative arts, with research outputs that include academic publications, films, documentaries, poems, songs, and theatrical performances. With a strong commitment to social justice, Professor Douglas explores themes of identity, mental health, and lived experience, often focusing on marginalised or stigmatised groups. She co-authored *Sport and Physical*

Activity for Mental Health and Life Story Research in Sport, and is completing a third book on arts-based research methods.

Kitrina has led and contributed to research for organisations such as the UK Department of Health, UK Sport, and the Women's Sport & Fitness Foundation. She is also a visiting professor at the University of Coimbra, Portugal, and has received multiple accolades for her research innovation and impact.



Inclusion that ignores language is incomplete

Dr Chelsea Whittaker

Across educational settings in Ireland and beyond, inclusion is often framed through the lens of disability and special educational needs. While this focus has driven important progress, it can leave less visible dimensions, such as language, migration and identity, at the margins of policy and practice.

This keynote broadens our understanding of inclusion by positioning language as central to the learners' experiences of belonging, access, and participation. Grounded in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector in Ireland, it draws on research and professional practice related to English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) provision and the development of the Diversity and Inclusion in FET (DIFET) Framework Programme at the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin.

Drawing on findings from several research projects across sectors, the keynote explores how language-aware practices such as translanguaging pedagogies, Universal Design for Learning, and inclusive assessment can support adult learners whose linguistic repertoires extend beyond English or Irish. These insights foreground the role of educators in recognising and valuing multilingualism not as a barrier, but as a resource.

Examples include inclusive homework practices in multilingual families and the integration of home languages in FET classrooms, offering practical strategies for supporting linguistic diversity. Emphasising teacher professional learning and learner-centred approaches, the keynote argues for embedding language awareness in inclusive education frameworks, particularly within FET.

In Ireland's increasingly multilingual society, this work challenges us to reimagine inclusion in ways that affirm all learners' identities. Rather than viewing multilingualism as a challenge to manage, this paper positions it as a resource for learning, connection, and educational transformation. If we are committed to inclusion, we must ask not only who is included, but how their languages and identities are recognised.

Bio-Note

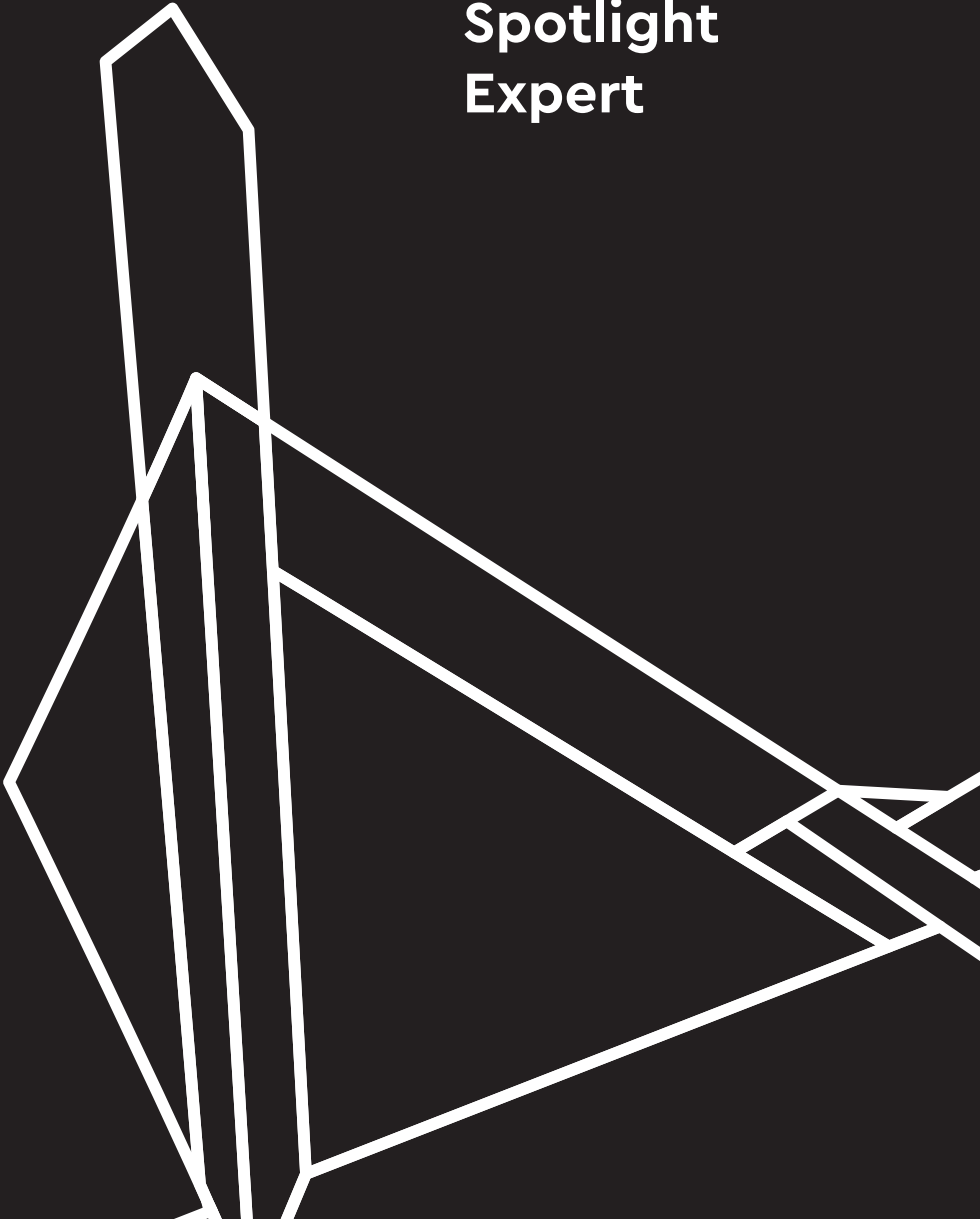
Dr Chelsea Whittaker is an Assistant Professor in Further Education and Training and Inclusion at the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. Originally from Cape Town, South Africa, she brings a rich interdisciplinary background in Education and Psychology, with academic degrees from the University of Cape Town, University of South Africa, and a PhD from Trinity College Dublin.

Her research is grounded in a strong commitment to social justice, inclusion, and community wellbeing. She explores themes of language, identity, multilingualism, and education—particularly the experiences of migrant learners in the Irish education system. Her doctoral work offered a linguistic ethnography of migrant children’s multilingual identities, and she continues to contribute to areas such as language policy, ESOL, and family language practices.

Dr Whittaker is a member of the Language Use and Multilingualism in Education Research Group (LUMIERE) and coordinates the DIFET Qualifications Framework programme. Her work aims to bridge research, policy, and practice, with recent publications in *Language & Education* and contributions to national programme evaluations. She was recently recognised as a runner-up in Trinity’s 2023–24 Postgraduate Teaching Awards.



Spotlight Expert



Spotlight Conversation is an innovative session format that bridges the depth of a keynote with the dynamic engagement of a panel discussion. Featuring a single distinguished expert, this session centres on an in-depth conversation led by the conference chair, followed by open dialogue with delegates. It offers a focused yet interactive space to explore pressing themes with one of the leading voices in the field.

Dr Ian Mifsud

Bio-Note

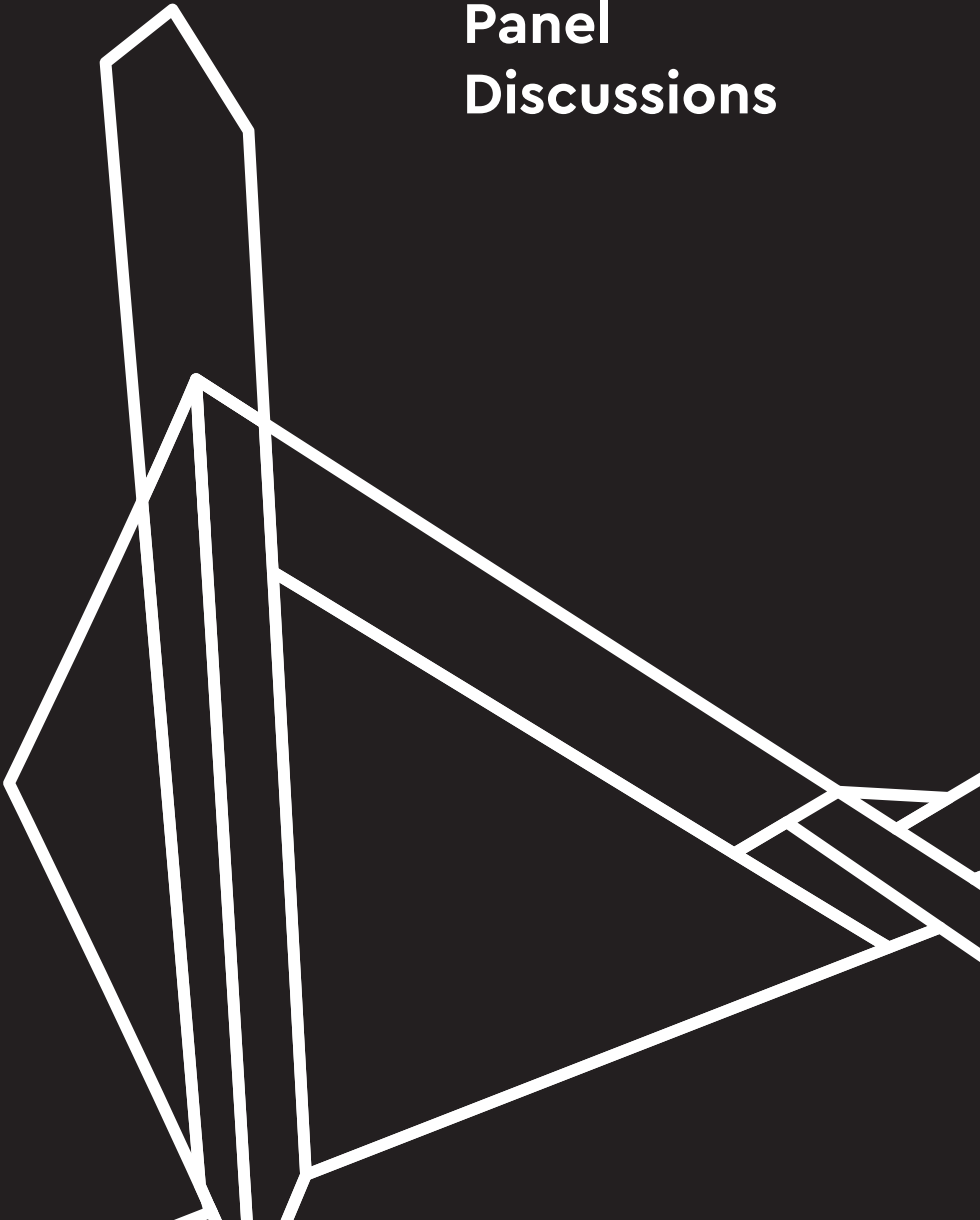
Dr Ian Mifsud is a seasoned educational leader and policy expert currently serving as Director General with the Secretariat for Catholic Education in Malta, a role he has held since 2018. In this capacity, he provides strategic guidance and support to Church schools across the country in the pursuit of educational excellence.

Previously, Dr Mifsud was Director General for Quality and Standards in Education within Malta's Ministry for Education and Employment, following his earlier tenure as Director of Quality Assurance. His leadership journey also includes foundational roles at the school level, notably as the founding Head of St Nicholas College Boys Secondary School in Naxxar, and earlier as Assistant Head at both St Nicholas College, Mtarfa and St Margaret College, Cospicua.

Beginning his career in 1997 as an Art teacher and Guidance Teacher on Malta's Anti-Substance Abuse Policy Team, Dr Mifsud has since earned a reputation for visionary educational leadership. He holds multiple degrees from the University of Malta, including a B.Ed., a postgraduate diploma in Educational Administration and Management, and an M.Ed. in Educational Leadership. He earned his doctorate in Education Management from the University of Lincoln (UK), where his research focused on quality education, school networks, and stakeholder engagement.

Dr Mifsud has been a key figure in the development of national education strategies and policies, and is a regular contributor to local and international educational conferences.

Panel Discussions



This section introduces the panel discussions featured at the Annual International Multidisciplinary Conference (AIMC) at Junior College, presenting the structure and focus of five panels that explore key issues shaping contemporary education and society. Each panel centres on a distinct theme, accompanied by a brief overview to establish context and guide the conversation.

To enrich the dialogue, illustrative connections to UNESCO's Four Pillars of Learning—Learning to Know, Learning to Do, Learning to Live Together, and Learning to Be—are included as possible reference points. These examples are intended to suggest potential directions for academic inquiry and discussion, while recognising that panellists are encouraged to explore a wide range of perspectives beyond those proposed.



Panel 1

The Responsibility of Education in Dynamic Social Contexts

In a rapidly evolving social landscape, education plays a vital role in shaping responsible and informed citizens. This panel will examine how educational institutions can respond to critical societal challenges such as inequality, social justice, mental health, and climate change, while also emphasizing the importance of civic engagement and global awareness.

Grounded in UNESCO's Four Pillars of Learning, the discussion may explore how education can deepen understanding of social issues (Learning to Know), equip students with the skills to take meaningful action (Learning to Do), foster inclusive and empathetic communities (Learning to Live Together), and support the development of self-awareness, resilience, and social responsibility (Learning to Be).

Panelists & Moderator

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi - UM Youth, Community & Migration Studies

Dr Louise Chircop - HOD, UM Department of Education Studies

Dr Ian Mifsud - Director General, Secretariat for Catholic Education, Malta

Ms Rhoda Garland - Commissioner for the Rights of Persons with Disability

Moderator: Dr Angele Deguara



Panel 2

The Future of Assessment – Going beyond Exams

As traditional examinations lose their dominance as the primary measure of academic achievement, this panel will consider alternative assessment methods that emphasize meaningful learning, creativity, and real-world application over rote memorization. The conversation may include approaches such as formative assessments, portfolios, project-based evaluations, and digital tools that support deeper engagement with learning.

UNESCO's Four Pillars of Learning may serve as a helpful reference point—encouraging a rethinking of assessment to prioritize critical thinking and lifelong learning (Learning to Know), hands-on evaluation of practical and employability skills (Learning to Do), collaborative and empathetic approaches to group work (Learning to Live Together), and opportunities for personal reflection and growth (Learning to Be).

Panelists & Moderator

Prof. Michael Buhagiar - UM Department of Mathematics & Science Education

Ms Desiree Scicluna Bugeja - Director of Examinations, MEYR

Ms Amanda Cassar - Director Institute for the Trades, Centre for Learning and Employability, MCAST

Ms Joanne Grima - CEO, Institute for Education

Moderator: Ms Karen Buttigieg

Panel 3

Creativity & Innovation – Unleashing Potential in Education

Creativity and innovation are essential for addressing today's complex global challenges, and this panel will examine how educators can embed these capacities within curricula to promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and originality. The discussion will touch on the role of the arts, technology, and interdisciplinary strategies in nurturing innovation, with particular attention to their application in language teaching to enhance multilingualism, communication, and cultural exchange through dynamic, learner-centered practices.

UNESCO's Four Pillars of Learning may provide a valuable lens—supporting the development of foundational knowledge in creative disciplines (Learning to Know), the use of design thinking and expressive, project-based learning (Learning to Do), the cultivation of empathy and collaboration through shared creative processes (Learning to Live Together), and the encouragement of individuality and self-confidence through creative exploration (Learning to Be)

Panelists & Moderator

Prof. Alexiei Dingli - UM Department of Artificial Intelligence

Dr Clara Chetcuti - Senior Research Officer, Applied Research and Innovation Centre, MCAST

Prof. Kitrina Douglas - Professor of Narrative and Performative Research, University of West London

Prof. Margaret Mangion - Director UM Edward DeBono Institute for Creative Thinking & Innovation

Moderator: Ms Maria Giuliana Fenech

Panel 4

Enterprise & Financial Intelligence – Empowering Students for Economic Success

In an increasingly complex and competitive global economy, this panel will consider how educational institutions can equip students with entrepreneurial skills and financial literacy to prepare them for real-world challenges. The discussion will highlight the importance of fostering financial responsibility, strategic thinking, and ethical leadership as essential components of modern education.

UNESCO's Four Pillars of Learning may inform this conversation—encouraging the exploration of global economic trends and business principles (Learning to Know), the application of entrepreneurship and management skills to enhance employability and innovation (Learning to Do), the development of collaborative leadership and negotiation abilities (Learning to Live Together), and the cultivation of ethical decision-making, financial well-being, and self-awareness (Learning to Be).

Panelists & Moderator

Dr Emanuel Mizzi - HOD, UM Department of Technology & Entrepreneurship Education

Ms Fabianne Ruggier - Junior Achievement Malta (JA) Board Chairperson

Dr Marthese Portelli - CEO, The Malta Chamber

Dr Marika Enriquez - Senior Manager, Gemma

Moderator: Ms Diane Oswald



Panel 5

Diversity Management in Educational Institutions—Navigating Social, Cultural, and Ethical Challenges

This panel will examine strategies for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within educational institutions, emphasizing how recognizing and valuing cultural and social differences can lead to more empathetic, collaborative, and cohesive learning environments. The conversation will also consider the ethical responsibilities of educators, leadership roles in promoting equity, and the impact of institutional policies.

UNESCO's Four Pillars of Learning may offer a guiding framework—supporting the development of knowledge around social justice, human rights, and diversity (Learning to Know), the implementation of inclusive practices and programs (Learning to Do), the promotion of cross-cultural understanding and the dismantling of bias through collaboration (Learning to Live Together), and the cultivation of empathy, identity, and self-reflection in diverse educational settings (Learning to Be).

Panelists and Moderator

Dr Chelsea Whittaker - Assistant Professor in Education, Trinity College, Dublin

Dr François Mifsud - HOD, UM Department of Inclusion & Access to Education

Ms Elysia Marie Barbara - Senior Lecturer 1 | Coordinator of Individual and Social Responsibility levels 4-6 & CSR levels 4-6 | Centre for Learning and Employability, MCAST

Dr Heathcliff Schembri - MCAST Senior Lecturer in Education

Moderator: Ms Edel Cassar

Presentation Abstracts



Subjective Wellbeing among Maltese students in Further Education

Claire Abela, Elaine Atkins, Isabelle Zammit

Subjective wellbeing (SWB) has emerged as a vital indicator of student mental health and educational success, particularly in the context of post-pandemic recovery. The study investigates SWB among students in a vocational education setting in Malta. Against a backdrop of increasing global and local mental health concerns among students, this research explores SWB using a multidimensional model encompassing Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect, and Negative Affect. Data were collected from 391 students aged 16–46 ($M = 19$) through validated instruments: the Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule. Results indicate significant interrelations between wellbeing components, with demographic and contextual variables such as age, socio-economic status, level and area of study, perceived responsibilities, perceived health, and student-lecturer relationships showing significant associations with SWB outcomes. Notably, students with diagnosed mental health conditions or learning disabilities reported low SWB. The study underscores the importance of fostering supportive educational environments and highlights SWB as a key factor in educational and psychological interventions aimed at improving student outcomes.



Project-Based Learning approach in web design education

Musawar Ahmad

Digital literacy plays a vital role in 21st century education and in web design learning as a core skill set in Computing and Technology syllabi. Worldwide pedagogical trends show that Project-Based Learning (PBL) is widely accepted as a method for student involvement, practical capability, and problem-solving skills. However, comparison of PBL with traditional teaching methods exhibits limited empirical research in the Maltese context. This study compares the value of three pedagogies: Learn and Practice (traditional), Hybrid, and fully Project-Based Learning (PBL) in teaching web design modules to the students of the University of Malta, Junior College. The study addresses three key questions: 1. How do the three models of teaching differ from each other in learning outcomes? 2. What are the challenges and benefits observed by students and educators? 3. How well does each method prepare students for real-life application of web design skills? A mixed method approach combining quantitative data of 26 students' surveys and qualitative feedback from three educators' open-ended surveys was used. Descriptive and inferential statistics compared the engagement, confidence, and readiness in all groups while thematic analysis elucidated the responses of educators. Findings show that PBL achieved the highest levels of engagement, skill development, and real-life readiness with issues in teamwork and assessment. The Hybrid approach actively balanced the structure of creativity and autonomy whereas the Learn and Practice was effective for theoretical instructions but marked low in support for learning and motivation. This research contributes original insights into pedagogical strategies in Maltese ICT education and offers actionable endorsements for curriculum development, teaching practices, and assessment planning.

Reimagining leadership in the light of Artificial Intelligence

Khalifah Al-Balawi

The study aims to present the proposed mechanisms for reimagining leaders in the light of artificial intelligence techniques in Saudi universities by revealing the cognitive framework of artificial intelligence and the most prominent differences between artificial and human intelligence. It also attempts to reveal the importance of artificial intelligence in leading university institutions as well as the most important artificial intelligence techniques necessary for contemporary university leaders. Furthermore, it seeks to highlight the most prominent challenges that university leaders have to face in the application of artificial intelligence techniques. To achieve its goals, the study uses the descriptive analytical approach by analysing studies and scientific papers and showing their results that deal with leadership in the light of artificial intelligence techniques. The results show that there is a difference between artificial and human intelligence. Artificial intelligence performs tasks in a way that is faster and easier to document. In addition, artificial intelligence contributes to improving the efficiency of the administrative apparatus of educational institutions and accesses services in a high level of accuracy, in addition to the incomparable speed in storing information. While the results show that artificial intelligence includes a wide range of techniques and tools such as machine learning, they also reveal a set of challenges such as ethical concerns that should be addressed to ensure the fair use of these technologies and concerns about data privacy and security. Finally, the study recommends the need to adopt the proposed mechanisms and to facilitate the policies and procedures for their implementation.



Fostering student wellbeing through art: a case study in Turin

Sofia Alessandri, Sonia Bertolini

In the last few years following the pandemic and other global events that have profoundly impacted the younger generations' prospects and academic experiences (Bertolini & Rasetti, 2022), attention towards university students' wellbeing has increased. While universities have responded by monitoring this phenomenon and by strengthening counselling services (Di Nuovo *et al.*, 2021; Simonetti, 2024), these interventions alone do not suffice (Bastianoni *et al.*, 2024). The need arose to address this issue preventively by fostering a culture of wellbeing within the academic institutions. This is the context in which *Facciamo Arte* was developed as an action-research project by the University of Turin, with the purpose of promoting student wellbeing, socialisation and inclusion in university life, developing soft skills, re-defining university spaces and re-discovering bodies through art. The project proposed a series of creative-psychosocial workshops spanning dance, music and theatre, often investigated in the context of the promotion of wellbeing (Grossi *et al.*, 2011; Passaretti *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, the activities aim at offsetting the long-term consequences of the pandemic while fostering resilience in the younger generations in a context of polycrisis (Bertolini & Ramella, 2023). Using a mixed-method of quantitative and qualitative research data, questionnaires, focus groups and interviews, our empirical research has detected the impact of the workshops on the participants' wellbeing, socialisation, body image and transversal skills. Preliminary results indicate that students struggle the most with social, community and psychological wellbeing. Qualitative data shows that the workshops seem to have contributed to these areas as participants indicate a sense of general wellbeing encouraged through the artistic approach employed in the activities, while contributing as well to the development of self-esteem, empathy, self and body awareness and new social relationships.

Learning spaces for wellbeing, flourishing, innovation and creativity

Amanda Bezzina

Since learning environments can be conducive to student wellbeing, this study examines student perspectives on learning spaces in Maltese schools, highlighting their influence on wellbeing. Adopting Barrett *et al.*'s (2015) framework - naturalness, individualisation and stimulation - this research used an interpretivist approach with 16 focus groups involving primary (8-10 years) and secondary (11-16 years) students. Findings revealed students' dissatisfaction with current learning environments, reinforcing Barrett's dimensions, and identified a new factor: innovative learning spaces. Students emphasised the need for proper lighting, acoustics, temperature control, nature connections and calming colours. They also valued flexible, personalised spaces that foster engagement. The study advocates for student-inclusive design to enhance wellbeing and learning outcomes. By integrating natural elements, adaptable layouts and stimulating features, schools can create more effective environments. These insights offer policymakers practical guidance for designing spaces that support both academic and emotional development, demonstrating how thoughtful design can improve student happiness and educational experiences. The research expands existing frameworks, emphasising the importance of innovative, participatory approaches in shaping future learning spaces.



From e-learning to the cognitive paradox: how Artificial Intelligence can reduce mental effort

Eleonora Bolsi

Despite the rapidly increasing possibilities of e-learning that is trying to keep up with the growing technological development in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI), studies on the use of AI for educational and research purposes cannot ignore the amount of time that adolescents and adults spend online for non-educational purposes, known as 'screen time'. In particular, it must consider the increasing use of internet devices and social networks in everyday life, especially concerning the cognitive paradox. This term refers to the risks associated with using AI for cognitive development, that can lead to the deterioration of certain abilities such as focus, critical thinking and problem-solving. Adopting a broader conception of human intelligence that is not dependent on the patterning of individual cognitive abilities but rather on the capability to convert cognitive experience into acquired knowledge, this contribution aims to emphasise the importance of mental effort in cognitive enrichment. Research on the importance of effort in intelligence is limited, as is research into the link between mental effort and the use of Artificial Intelligence. Four risk factors in AI usage will be explored: cognitive offloading, distractibility, over-reliance and cognitive overload. This paper will finally explore how establishing a connection between intelligence and learning effort holds promise for stimulating directed e-learning research while providing individuals with the knowledge needed to improve their digital literacy.

Wellbeing in Further Education: reflections through art

Roberta Borg Parnis

Wellbeing is often defined in terms of health, happiness, and life satisfaction. In reality, it is a complex and multifaceted concept resulting from the interplay between an individual's mental, physical, social, emotional and financial conditions. Such a complexity becomes even more evident when dealing with 16-18-year-old students in Further Education as they are navigating a crucial transitory period in life. Yet, despite the increased attention recently given to wellbeing, the post-secondary sector is still a relatively neglected group. To explore the multiple dimensions of this concept, this paper refers to well-known paintings to illustrate key ideas about student wellbeing, using visual reflection as a metaphorical framework to explore its diverse aspects. The paper explores five iconic paintings, including Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, which can be interpreted as symbolising external pressures and the resilience needed to face them. How individuals view and respond to art parallels the multidimensional nature of wellbeing itself. Thus, through these visual metaphors, the paper bridges the objective and subjective aspects of wellbeing, highlighting its non-static dimension, hence reflecting the ongoing stressors of student life that can impact their wellbeing. By linking these iconic paintings to the realities of students in Further Education, this paper offers reflections on the type of educational environments that can foster both personal and academic flourishing, emphasising the importance of educational spaces that recognise students not simply as achievers but also as individuals with complex inner and outer worlds.

The challenges of COVID-19 and of Artificial Intelligence in the student assessment process

Karl Camilleri

MCAST is one of the largest academic institutions in Europe that delivers Vocational Professional Education and Training (VPET) at a wide range of level qualifications. With a population of over nine thousand full-time and a further two thousand part-time students, it fulfils its ethos by delivering industry-focused courses based on best practice of the highest standards. Its assessment process aims at ensuring that all its students have the required latest technical knowledge benchmarked to EU standards, and the ability to analyse problems and to apply solutions in their field of expertise. To do so, MCAST has adopted various modes of assessment, ranging from the classical Time Constrained Assessments and Take-Home Assessments to Reflective Journals. However, the assessment process morphed and adapted between 2020 and 2025 in response to two major international challenges: the COVID-19 pandemic that shut down schools from March 10 till September 28, 2021, disrupting two academic years, and the appearance of ChatGPT on November 22, 2022. This Artificial Intelligence bot undermined one of the most preferred methods of assessment, namely Take-Home Assessments, due to the rise of and possibly undetectable plagiarism. In view of these occurrences, this presentation will explain the adaptive evolution of the assessment process within the last five years, implemented particularly by the Institute of Business Management and Commerce (IBMC), to turn these challenges into opportunities.



Integrating Project-Based Learning (PBL) into the language classroom: a hands-on experience

Luisa Caparros Flores

This study explores pedagogical practices within a heterogeneous, multicultural, and international Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) classroom through the implementation of a Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach. The initiative, developed for the institutional event *Jornadas Abiertas 2025* organised by the Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS), engaged students from two LANG A1–A2 SFL classes enrolled in tourism and hospitality programmes (MQF levels 4, 5, and 6). The project centred on the research, preparation, and presentation of Spanish *tapas*, non-alcoholic *sangria*, and cultural content related to Spain and its provinces. Framed by a participatory and collaborative methodology, the project was divided into three phases: (1) editing written and visual materials, (2) preparing traditional Spanish food and drink in a simulated 'laboratory bar' setting, and (3) delivering an interactive tasting experience complemented by cultural presentations. The teacher's role evolved into that of a mediator between the students' cultural backgrounds and the target culture. Outcomes suggest that PBL fosters increased student motivation, communicative competence and transferable skills relevant to future employment in the tourism and hospitality sectors. The success of this initiative supports the integration of PBL as a regular component of the curriculum.

Preparing Media Literacy educators the UNESCO way

George Cremona

Ten years have passed since, in 2015, the Faculty of Education (Malta) launched the two-year Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) course. Initially, Media Literacy was not included as an option. However, shortly after the beginning of the MTL course, news came out that starting from the scholastic year 2017-2018, the government was planning to launch Media Literacy nationally as an optional subject for 13 – 15-year-old students in Maltese state schools. As a reaction to this, the Faculty proactively initiated the process to formulate and initiate a two-year MTL course by 2017, through which schools could have fully qualified teachers of Media Literacy. As the Subject Coordinator responsible for the design of the study-units' course descriptions and for the launch of this Vocational Education and Training (VET) subject teacher education course, a meticulous thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2023) of the various drafts of the Media Literacy study unit contents will be presented in the light of the four pillars – know, do, live, be – designed by UNESCO (Delors, 1996, 2025), Specific attention will also be given to evolving paradigms such as Artificial Intelligence (Kalantzis and Cope, 2025) that have recently made their appearance. This presentation will conclude with five evaluative multimodal self-reflections which will serve as a beacon when designing and evaluating the Media Literacy study-unit course descriptions and other similar pedagogical texts.



Building inclusive school cultures: strategies for equity and belonging

Angele Deguara; Jessica Lament; Thomas Joseph O Shaughnessy;
Leah O'Toole

The presentation, based on inclusive school cultures, forms part of an online interactive, multimedia resource aimed at empowering future educators to understand and embrace inclusivity. The tool was produced during a workshop at Maynooth University, Ireland, as part of an International Erasmus project, extended over a three-year period, involving 144 educators, researchers and activists from 28 countries. At a time of increasing social and cultural diversity, educational institutions play a crucial role in fostering a culture of inclusivity, equity, and belonging. This presentation explores the concept of an inclusive school culture, underlining the importance of shared values, collaboration and leadership in creating educational spaces where all members of the community feel valued and respected. It highlights how inclusive education extends beyond integration, actively embracing diversity across race, gender, ability, socioeconomic background and other identity markers while making everyone feel that they belong. Four key components of an inclusive school culture will be examined: attitudes, collaboration, knowledge, and leadership. Attitudinal shifts among educators and students are necessary for the breaking down of stereotypes while collaboration between stakeholders - including educators, families, and policymakers - ensures holistic and sustainable inclusion. Research-based knowledge-building and professional development equip educators with the tools to foster inclusive pedagogical practices. Educational leadership is essential in implementing policies, securing resources, and modelling inclusive behaviours to instil a school ethos that embraces diversity, equity and inclusivity as core institutional values.

Wellbeing and academic resilience in post-secondary students

Josephine Ebejer Grech

This study explores the perspectives of 12 students and 12 educators on the essential skills required to manage academic stressors such as workloads and deadlines in a post-secondary school in Malta. Using a qualitative inductive approach, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted to identify and classify these skills within Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping. Findings revealed a consensus on the importance of problem-focused strategies, including time management, problem-solving, adaptability and self-efficacy, along with emotion-focused strategies such as emotional intelligence, cognitive reframing, growth mindset and mindfulness. The study highlights the need for integrating metacognitive strategies into the curriculum to equip students with practical tools for resilience, fostering their ability to navigate academic challenges effectively. Furthermore, the research offers actionable recommendations for educators and school leaders to create a supportive learning environment that promotes resilience and wellbeing. The findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on student support by providing insights into how Maltese academic post-secondary schools can prepare students better for the demands of higher education and professional life.



Biology essay performance: trends in MATSEC results, 2014–2024

Michelle Ellul, Marthese Azzopardi

Essay-based assessment plays a crucial role in evaluating students' analytical and scientific communication skills. It also forms an integral part of the second paper of the Advanced Matriculation Certificate in Biology offered by the local provider, MATSEC. This study presents an analysis of essay performance data spanning from 2014 to 2024 where the variation in essay marks across the decade was significant. Scores from Section B, whereby the candidates have to complete two essays, were strongly correlated with the overall exam outcomes, showing the critical role of extended writing in student success. The statistical analysis showed that the marks obtained in the afore-mentioned section differed significantly from the other two sections examined in the paper that assessed comprehension and shorter essay responses. The significant difference observed in essay topic selection was gender based. However, gender neither played a role in determining whether students chose descriptive, discussion or comparative essay types nor in their performance which was, on the other hand, influenced significantly by the topics being examined and by the type of essay selected. These findings offer an insight into how assessment structure and content affect student performance while providing a basis for an informed design of future exams and for more pedagogical alignment. This will help educators support students better when demonstrating their analytical and communication skills, ultimately enabling them to achieve improved results.

Mapping migration and achievement: sectoral differences in Maltese schools

Christine Fenech

Over the past decade, Malta has experienced a significant population increase, primarily driven by the increase in non-Maltese residents. This demographic shift is reflected in student enrolment patterns across the country's three main school sectors: State, Church, and Independent schools. Data from the National Statistics Office indicates that while the number of Maltese students has remained stable or declined slightly, the number of non-Maltese students has continued to grow. Notably, Independent schools have the highest proportion of non-Maltese students, followed by State schools, while Church schools remain relatively homogenous in their student composition. Alongside cultural diversity, socio-economic disparities among students in the three sectors are also pronounced. Evidence from the PISA 2022 Malta report highlights a socio-economic stratification between sectors, likely influenced by differing funding models. These disparities are closely linked to academic performance, with consistent differences in student achievement in reading, Mathematics and Science observed across the three sectors since 2009. However, there remains a critical gap in publicly available data on the academic achievement of migrant students as a distinct group – both overall and across sectors. This study addresses that gap by analysing the demographic composition of students within each school sector, with a specific focus on the profile and academic performance of migrant students. It examines how these profiles have evolved between the 2018 and 2022 PISA cycles and explores the implications of these changes on student outcomes within and across the different sectors.

Learning from learners: insights of Maltese post-16 students on sustainability

Mario Fenech Caruana

This study explores the perspectives of Junior College students in Malta on energy and water conservation, aligning with evolving paradigms in post-16 education that emphasise sustainability, student agency, and interdisciplinary learning. Based on quantitative data from a pilot study (2024) and main survey (2025), supported by qualitative responses to open-ended questions, this research examines students' awareness, behaviours, perceived barriers, and expectations regarding sustainability practices. Findings reveal consistently high environmental awareness and strong proconservation attitudes, particularly regarding climate change and resource preservation. However, a persistent "attitude-action gap" emerged, linked to barriers including the cost of sustainable products, inconvenience and doubts about individual impact. Students expressed frustration that personal efforts are undermined by industrial pollution and insufficient regulation of major polluters. They placed high expectations on authorities and institutions to lead sustainability efforts, preferring financial incentives over penalties to promote behaviour change. Environmental education was frequently viewed as inadequate, with calls for long-term campaigns, social media outreach and clearer communication of environmental impact. Notably, students demonstrated growing interest in participating in structured environmental initiatives, especially those with institutional backing. Despite limitations including sample size and self-reporting bias, the study offers actionable insights for education and policy aimed at bridging the awareness-action gap and fostering a culture of sustainability.



Enhancing Advanced level Pure Mathematics education at the Junior College, Malta

Romina Galea

Since research shows that students often lack awareness of the relevance of the Mathematics they are required to learn at sixth-form level, gaining insight into how Mathematics is applied across various fields can surely help students prepare better for their future studies and careers. A cross-sectional study was carried out among Junior College students enrolled in Advanced level Pure Mathematics using a structured questionnaire consisting of both closed- and open-ended questions to evaluate the effectiveness of current teaching methods and identify potential improvements to enhance the learning experience for future students. Other aims of the research are to establish evidence of gender differences in students' preferences and experiences and to provide meaningful insights and constructive feedback to the MATSEC Board with the objective of informing future developments in the Advanced level Pure Mathematics curriculum. By analysing the students' responses, this study seeks to highlight areas of the current programme that are well-received and effective as well as identify opportunities for enhancement. Additionally, the results are intended to serve as a valuable resource to the Junior College administration and academic staff, offering evidence-based guidance on how to reinforce the strengths that make the Junior College a preferred choice among students. Ultimately, this research aspires to contribute to the continuous improvement of the educational experience for Mathematics students, fostering both academic excellence and student satisfaction.



Towards the overlooked: rethinking multicultural education in the East Asian context

Ken'ichiro Higuchi

In contemporary multicultural education, the inclusion of minority voices has become a widely accepted principle. However, significant disparities remain regarding which voices are amplified and which ones are overlooked. This presentation addresses the educational challenges surrounding the recognition of “minor-minorities”- marginalised groups even within minority discourses - and explores how their invisibility affects the depth and inclusivity of multicultural education. Drawing on examples from Japan, Thailand and South Korea, where the author has conducted related studies, this presentation examines Minor Ainu, Uilta people, Miyako and Yaeyama islanders (Japan), Tai Dam people (Thailand) and Baekjeong descendants (South Korea). While some minority groups have gained visibility and institutional support, these ultra-minoritised communities often remain excluded from public discourse and educational narratives. As a result, multicultural education risks losing dynamism and undermining the very inclusiveness it aims to foster. The presentation offers reflections for educators, proposing the cultivation of critical awareness toward structural invisibility, sensitivity to marginalised narratives, and collaborative inquiry with students. It also emphasises the responsibility of scholars to support emerging or peripheral studies often dismissed within academic hierarchies. Building a more inclusive academic culture - one that values diverse and tentative voices - can enrich educational practices and deepen the realisation of multicultural ideals. Ultimately, this presentation suggests that multicultural education can be reinvigorated not merely by recognising prominent minority groups but by consciously moving toward those whose experiences have long remained in the shadows.

Overcoming financial barriers to sustainable investment in Hospitality

Maria Jourdan

The adoption of energy-efficient (EE) and renewable energy (RE) solutions in the hospitality sector is influenced by financial intelligence, investment decision-making and economic incentives. While sustainability initiatives align with EU directives such as Fit for 55 and the European Agenda for Tourism 2030, many hotels struggle to integrate them due to financial constraints and uncertainty about return on investment (ROI). Small and independently owned hotels, in particular, face difficulties in accessing capital, even when government grants, tax incentives and EU funding programs are available. Additionally, a lack of financial literacy regarding sustainability funding mechanisms prevents businesses from fully leveraging financial tools such as green and sustainability-linked loans (SLLs), that provide preferential financing for meeting environmental targets. This study, based on qualitative research and in-depth interviews with hotel decision-makers in Malta, highlights the role of enterprise intelligence in sustainability adoption. The findings suggest that improved financial awareness, clearer policy communication and strategic stakeholder collaboration can help businesses make informed investment decisions. The study further demonstrates that sustainability initiatives are regulatory obligations and economic opportunities that enhance cost efficiency, competitiveness, and long-term profitability. The results underscore the key role of higher education when addressing these challenges: by integrating sustainability finance, green investment strategies and EU policy frameworks into academic programmes, Higher Education institutions can prepare future hospitality leaders and support current professionals in overcoming knowledge gaps. This positions universities as vital actors in driving sustainable transformation in tourism and hospitality.

Leveraging language for innovation in multi-disciplinary collaboration

Marjan Khedri

In today's interconnected world, interdisciplinary collaboration is essential across academic and professional settings. Effective communication lies at the heart of such partnerships, enabling innovation and shared understanding. Using UNESCO's four Pillars of Education as a framework, this paper explores how language enhances multi-disciplinary collaboration. Communication, in which language is an essential tool, is ultimately the foundation of effective cross-disciplinary teamwork, transforming diverse perspectives into action and enabling sustained, meaningful collaboration and innovation. Drawing from the author's first-hand involvement in innovate initiatives such as a recent project in Tehran where engineers, educators, and policymakers united to co-create inclusive digital learning tools, this presentation offers both theoretical insight and real-world relevance. It highlights how effective communication is essential for fostering successful multi-disciplinary collaborations and to drive innovation. By understanding and applying communication practices that align with UNESCO's Four Pillars of Education, diverse teams can transform their collective knowledge and perspectives into meaningful solutions for real-world challenges.



Shaping Youth Perceptions Through Climate Change Education

Mark Mifsud, Elaine Mifsud Scicluna

Young adults are key stakeholders in sustainable development, yet their capacity to respond to the growing challenges of climate change is often limited by gaps in education and engagement. This study explores the potential of a contextualised, year-long educational intervention to strengthen climate-related knowledge, critical thinking, and adaptive capacity among post-secondary students within an Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) framework. The research was conducted at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), employing a mixed-methods design. A baseline questionnaire captured students' initial perceptions and attitudes toward climate issues. This was followed by sustained participation in a climate change education programme grounded in ESD principles. The intervention adopted a student-centred, multimodal approach—integrating media, reflective dialogue, and literacy-based tasks—to promote systems thinking, participatory learning, and long-term engagement. A follow-up questionnaire administered at the end of the academic year revealed positive shifts in students' awareness, values, and willingness to act on climate-related concerns. Participants also reported strong engagement with the programme's pedagogical design, which emphasised both local relevance and global interconnectedness. Findings support the role of sustained, context-specific ESD interventions in fostering not only climate literacy but also the competencies needed for transformative action. The study concludes with recommendations for strengthening ESD practices in vocational and technical education settings, with potential implications for broader curriculum development.

Children's news in Further Education: multimodal pedagogical insights

Deborah Muscat, George Cremona

Children's news programmes and their potential educational value have often been overlooked, especially in Malta's educational context (Muscat 2023). To address this lacuna, as its main research focus, this paper explores how the multimodal evaluation of such news programmes aimed at for children can inform the learning contexts of educators working in Further Education (16+). Adopting a qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006) of the data collected through semi-structured interviews (Wellington 2000) carried out with primary teachers in Malta, this paper intends to present the extent to which teachers feel prepared to incorporate child-oriented news in their lessons. The findings will highlight how Further Education (16+) teacher education programmes can benefit from the use of news programmes aimed at for children and adolescents. If used diligently, these can enhance critical engagement and social awareness while instilling in learners a sense of active citizenship. The paper also explores the challenges and benefits teachers feel students can experience through this pedagogical measure. As its main conclusion, this paper will provide five multimodal pedagogical recommendations aimed at educators working in Further Education (16+) learning contexts through which child-oriented news items can lay a foundation for lifelong learning and responsible citizenship.



Inclusive on paper, elusive in practice? Evaluating literacy in disability

Loredana Muscat

Despite Malta's formal commitment to inclusive education, a crucial question remains: how effectively do students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) learn to read in the mainstream education system? This presentation explores the disparity between educational policy and the actual literacy instruction provided to students with ID, utilising findings from a mixed-methods study that incorporates statistical data from Individualised Education Plan (IEP) entries and insights from interviews with 12 Inclusion Coordinators across various educational contexts. The quantitative analysis of IEP goals shows that literacy objectives are frequently set, particularly in the early primary years; however, many of these goals are only partially completed, with success rates diminishing as students move into secondary education. A detailed review of Maltese and English literacy objectives reveals shifting priorities and a lack of consistency across different educational phases and sectors. Qualitative data further highlights this challenge as educators express concerns over inadequate specialised training, limited execution of structured literacy interventions, and significant variation in the application of these strategies. This study prompts essential questions regarding the realisation of inclusive literacy practices in Malta, stressing the need for clearer policy development, focused educator training, and the implementation of evidence-based, systematic instruction designed to cater to the needs of learners with ID. Without these critical changes, the promise of inclusion runs the risk of remaining merely a statement rather than becoming a genuine transformation.



Artificial Intelligence study companion blueprint for post-secondary academic skill building

Luca Nguyen

Across Maltese post-secondary pathways, many students go through sixth form or vocational colleges lacking confident critical reading, academic writing and presentation skills. Large study-skills workshops offer generic advice but little personalised feedback. This paper, therefore, proposes a conceptual AI study companion that guides learners through low-stakes Plan-Do-Reflect cycles of self-regulated learning to strengthen these competences. A Design Science Research process frames the work. Diagnostic analyses reveal the major skill gaps, informing the formulation of eight design requirements grounded in learning-science and transition literature. These shape a Retrieval-Augmented Generative model that queries a vetted corpus, keeps data on Maltese servers and faces scheduled bias audits. Planned ex-ante evaluation combines persona-based cognitive walkthroughs (e.g. sixth form graduate or incoming international student) with heuristic review before a live pilot is implemented. Learner interaction begins with a diagnostic quiz. The AI companion, accessible at any time, then personalises prompts and feedback to each learner's profile by proposing level-matched micro-tasks and by prompting immediate revision of wording or structure. In the preparation of presentations, it supports purpose, audience and storyline development, and then offers structured feedback on draft slides. Educators monitor anonymised dashboards, adjust prompts and intervene where necessary, maintaining a human-in-the-loop ethos. The study aims to deliver three contributions: 1) a theory-grounded conceptual model that automates micro-tasks for academic literacy during the Further Education-to-Higher Education transition; 2) a privacy-first design checklist for FE colleges and universities exploring AI tutors; 3) a staged research agenda that moves AI companions from idea to actionable prototype.

Building the future workforce: rethinking vocational high schools in Japan

Tomokazu Oba

This presentation explores the alignment of education and economics within the context of vocational high schools in upper secondary education. In the aftermath of World War II, Japan's economic revitalisation strategy centred on the development of industrial human resources through the implementation of an inclined industry system. In response, the government enacted the Industrial Education Promotion Act in 1951 and implemented measures that focused on education in the fields of Science and Engineering. Concurrent with these measures, the number of technical high schools augmented. Consequently, the high school enrolment rate exhibited a marked increase, surpassing 90% in 1974. This trend toward academic achievement, coupled with a growing preference for university enrolment, led to a decline in the appeal of industrial high schools that eventually began to prioritise academic subjects and transitioned towards university enrolment. Conversely, there is a persistent demand for industrial high school graduates, and some companies have ceased operations due to challenges in hiring. Indeed, the job offer-to-applicant ratio for industrial high school students increased from 3.30 in 2003 to 27.2 in 2023. The demand for graduates of industrial high schools remains high. This presentation, provides a comprehensive analysis of the social context of vocational high schools in the later stages of secondary education in Japan, drawing upon statistical data to support our findings. Furthermore, it examines interview data with teachers from a functionalist perspective to identify contemporary challenges in vocational high schools. This will clarify why it is difficult to combine schools and the labour market despite their link.



Exploring Generative AI in post-secondary Marketing education

Diane Oswald

This paper investigates the practical use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in updating and enhancing Marketing lecturing resources at a post-secondary institution in Malta. Focusing on GenAI's capacity to generate text, images, and video in response to user input, this study explores different tools that can be used to support educators in the development, renewal and customisation of resources in Higher Education. Through an observational and experimental approach, primary data were collected to understand how such tools can assist educators in producing content that is current, relevant, and pedagogically appropriate, while also aligning with curriculum objectives. During the study, various GenAI tools were used for specific content creation tasks related to different Marketing topics. These tasks included updating outdated business case studies, designing infographics and supporting visuals, presenting case studies in audio-visual format and generating quiz questions from detailed topic notes to assess student retention. Each tool was evaluated based on usability, time efficiency, customisability, and curricular alignment. Key findings suggest that GenAI offers significant advantages in terms of incorporating innovative teaching methodologies, saving time, and providing a wider variety of content in lecturing resources. However, observations provided qualitative insights into how GenAI outputs often require careful review and adaptation to ensure academic accuracy, relevance to the local context and alignment with learning outcomes. The study finds that while Generative AI can be integrated into teaching practice as a co-creator of educational resources, there are limitations and risks when relying on AI-generated content without human oversight.

Classics Through Digital Leisure-Learning – Project CITADEL

Carmel Serracino, Andrew Debono Cauchi

Classics Through Digital Leisure-Learning (CITADEL) is a Creative Europe project* led by the University of Malta, in collaboration with the University of Gdańsk (Poland), the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (the Netherlands) and WeBee, a Web-development company. Project CITADEL aims to revive the interest of young people in Classics and classical literature. This aim is being achieved through the creation, promotion and distribution of a digitised game downloadable through a mobile phone app. The core component of project CITADEL is a teaching campaign held in middle and secondary schools across Malta, Poland, and the Netherlands. This teaching campaign has three objectives: (1) to introduce participants to the world of Greek mythology and the Homeric epics, (2) to invite participants to input their own ideas and suggestions for the digital game being developed by CITADEL, and (3) to assess young people's knowledge and perception of Greek mythology. This paper will first present the results of project CITADEL's teaching campaign in Malta and then explore how these results could offer innovative pedagogical models for the teaching of Classics in the 21st century classrooms.

*Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Teaching English in Maltese secondary schools: challenges and growth

John Paul Vella

Malta's education system is undergoing systemic changes. Teachers' daily practices are being transformed amid demographic shifts, increased cultural and linguistic diversity, rapid digital and AI developments, national curriculum reforms, and a revised SEC exam now including School-Based Assessments (SBAs). For teachers of English in middle and secondary schools in Malta, the responsibility of learners' proficiency in both language and literature entails a dual focus that demands distinct pedagogical approaches and specialised subject knowledge. In this context, systemic changes may challenge long-held beliefs, established teaching practices and professional identities, with significant implications for teacher wellbeing. These educators also face added complexity due to English serving not only as a core subject but also as the medium of instruction across the curriculum. Moreover, students' proficiency in English critically affects their access to the broader curriculum and their future prospects, placing additional pressure on teachers to meet increasingly diverse and high-stakes demands. This presentation draws on survey data collected from 41 teachers of English across State, Church and Independent schools in Malta and Gozo, as part of ongoing doctoral research. While the findings are not generalisable beyond this sample, they offer valuable insights into teachers' perceptions of teaching demands, working conditions, collaboration, professional identity, and wellbeing. Despite the challenges faced, teachers remain committed, adaptable, and value professional development, seeking further support to handle reforms more effectively and meaningfully. This research underscores the value of listening to the teachers' experiences, practices, concerns, and daily realities while prioritising responsive strategies and context-sensitive professional learning to sustain their wellbeing.

A comparative analysis of Advanced level Mathematics assessment

Christina Zarb

This study investigates the assessment style and curricular focus of the MATSEC Advanced Pure Mathematics examination, positioning it as the primary subject of analysis within a comparative framework involving British Advanced Mathematics/ Further Mathematics (AQA) and the International Baccalaureate Mathematics: Analysis and Approaches (AA) Higher Level. The motivation stems from the increasing need for cross-system comparison especially within contexts where national qualifications are historically influenced by international benchmarks. The choice of boards reflects the historical and contemporary relevance of the UK and IB systems to Malta's educational landscape. Document analysis is conducted on official syllabi together with a sample of recent exam papers (May/June session in 2023 and 2024). Questions are classified by topic, cognitive demand, assessment objective, scaffolding and real-world context. This allows a systematic comparison of the depth and breadth of content, procedural fluency and conceptual understanding, as well as emphasis on proof, modelling, and interpretation. In addition, the study compares the structural architecture of assessment across systems, including the number, duration, and configuration of papers, the presence/absence of optional components, and the integration of applied mathematics domains such as mechanics and statistics. Ultimately, the study aims to examine how MATSEC aligns with or diverges from international norms that are historically related to the local educational system, and provide insights that can possibly be used for curriculum review, pedagogical development and policy setup in post-secondary Mathematics assessment.



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