Explanation of Epistemology in Caring Thinking from Matthew Lipman's Perspective

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Purpose: The present study was conducted to explain epistemology in caring thinking from Matthew Lipman's perspective.

Methods and Materials: The research method, based on its objective, was fundamental; based on the type of data, it was qualitative; based on the data collection time, it was cross-sectional; and based on the data collection method and research methodology, it was a meta-synthesis in the qualitative section. The statistical population of this study included scientific documents and resources such as specialized books, conducted research, dissertations, and articles on the philosophical foundations of caring thinking from Matthew Lipman's perspective and its educational implications, obtained from scientific databases and academic and organizational experts. The study's sampling process consisted of two sections. First, in the systematic literature review, a non-random purposive sampling method was used to select the theoretical foundations and research background based on entry criteria (a 27-item checklist following the PRISMA model). In the expert interview section, a non-random purposive sampling method was also used to select interviewees based on the research entry criteria (as specified in the target population section), and 25 interviewees were considered based on the principle of theoretical saturation. In this study, for the systematic review section, document analysis was used as the data collection tool, aligned with the research approach of systematic literature review and the review of national-level documents. In the interview section, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Additionally, a model validation questionnaire was used to assess expert opinions on the model's external validity. To calculate validity, a 27-item checklist based on the PRISMA model was employed. Additionally, Cohen's kappa coefficient was used to calculate reliability, which was confirmed. In the interview section, the credibility criterion was applied. The data analysis method in this study was theoretical coding, derived from thematic analysis using MAXQDA software.

Findings: The findings indicated that the philosophical foundations of caring thinking, based on Matthew Lipman's perspective, include ontological, anthropological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions. Furthermore, the results showed that the educational implications of the philosophical foundations of caring thinking from Matthew Lipman's perspective encompass acceptance and attention to diversity, focus on interpersonal relationships, respect for oneself and others, development of self-awareness, and enhancement of communication and problem-solving skills.

Conclusion: The study highlights the philosophical foundations of caring thinking from Matthew Lipman's perspective, emphasizing logical thinking, adaptability, and philosophical dialogue. Caring thinking fosters critical reflection, creativity, and adaptability, enhancing education by integrating emotional intelligence, ethical reasoning, and comprehensive cognitive development for lifelong learning.

Keywords: *Philosophical foundations, caring thinking, Matthew Lipman's perspective, educational implications*

1. Introduction

Today, the importance of designing an education system based on ethics has gained more attention than ever before. This is due to the presence of a complex and uncontrollable virtual environment in which numerous influencing factors play a role in shaping individuals, even at an unconscious level (Mardani et al., 2024; Meymanatabadi, 2023). Many scholars support the teachability of various types of thinking (Wang et al., 2024). In the past, it was believed that individuals could not be nurtured as thinkers and creative individuals, as thinking was generally considered an innate and hereditary trait, beyond control or manipulation. However, research findings by experts such as Ruitenburg (2025) have demonstrated that thinking, problem-solving, and creativity are not metaphysical phenomena but rather natural realities (Ruitenburg et al., 2025). Thinking follows the same laws, systems, and governing principles that apply to human behavior, meaning that thinking is a learned behavior. Therefore, individuals can be developed into thinkers and creative individuals by providing controlled conditions (Saritepeci & Yildiz Durak, 2024).

One of the classifications of thinking types is the categorization proposed by Matthew Lipman in 1994, which divides thinking into critical, creative, and caring thinking (Lipman, 2003; Lipman, 2023). Caring thinking has two meanings. First, it refers to an enthusiastic engagement with a subject that an individual contemplates, meaning that the person thinks about the topic with passion, intrinsic concern, and a commitment to employing all their cognitive resources to explore solutions to that mental problem. In this sense, caring represents a form of rationality to which we have previously committed ourselves. The second meaning of caring thinking involves concern for the manner of thinking itself. This means that, in addition to contemplating a person, idea, or subject occupying our minds, we also evaluate our own method and approach to thinking (Hedayati, 2018).

Caring thinking originates from emotions and feelings while also having a cognitive foundation (Sharp, 2017). Lipman argues that thinking that values ethical and moral considerations is caring thinking. Thinking about valuable, ethical, and conscientious matters entails reflecting on priorities and aspects that deserve special attention and care. It also involves contemplating ideals for a better world (Lipman, 2023).

To cultivate thoughtful individuals, critical and creative thinking alone is insufficient; there must also be an emotional or affective dimension that encompasses empathy, compassion, gratitude, appreciation, and love. When we engage in caring (responsible) thinking, we focus on what we consider important. What we value demands our cognitive engagement. In other words, higher-order thinking is not devoid of value (Oliveira, 2023). This type of thinking is a human capacity that is deeply rooted in the soul and heart. The method chosen for this study is qualitative content analysis. Content analysis involves identifying and highlighting the key themes and main lines of any text or written materials with the aim of providing a descriptive analysis (Franzini Tibaldeo, 2023).

The current education system lacks the capacity to train researchers and scholars. This deficiency is largely due to its theoretical and practical foundations. One of these foundations is the goals of education, which, despite being theoretically oriented toward valuable objectives, are practically focused on university entrance exam success and ensuring that students gain admission to higher education institutions by any means necessary. Additionally, overarching perspectives on knowledge and the education of children and adolescents neither support nor consider research and inquiry-based learning in schools as feasible (Barahman & Khodabakhshi Sadeghabadi, 2017; Cam, 2023). This is because, based on grand theories that define and determine children's cognitive abilities, their capacity for research and inquiry is not officially recognized. They are merely expected to memorize the discoveries of past scientists, which ultimately leads to rote learning. The positivist definition of science and knowledge, embedded in mainstream educational theories, exacerbates this issue (Saritepeci & Yildiz Durak, 2024; Zhengye, 2023). Furthermore, the social structures of the education system reinforce this problem. Moreover, the expectations of policymakers and parents reduce education to an instrumental means of securing well-paying jobs for children by any means possible (Hosseini et al., 2021).

However, focusing on caring thinking and its philosophical foundations, along with incorporating contemporary theories on children's and adolescents' cognitive abilities, modern epistemological perspectives, and new educational theories, offers a solution to these challenges. Additionally, training educators and parents and introducing new, research-based, and inquiry-driven teaching methods can help overcome these difficulties in the education system. The core logic of caring thinking is inquiry, and educational stakeholders are expected to pay special attention to this aspect. This type of thinking is based

on fundamental philosophical assumptions regarding "ontology," "anthropology," "axiology," and "epistemology." The belief in a dynamic and evolving world and the recognition of young individuals' cognitive flexibility in the Philosophy for Children (P4C) program reflect the distinct worldview of caring thinking, paving the way for fundamental questions about its philosophical foundations (Vahedi & Kabiri, 2022; Wu, 2022). Therefore, this study aims to elucidate the philosophical foundations of caring thinking in terms of "ontology," "anthropology," "axiology," and "epistemology" from Matthew Lipman's perspective. Based on the aforementioned points, the present study seeks to explore how epistemology in caring thinking can be explained from Lipman's perspective and what its epistemological implications are.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The research method, based on its objective, was fundamental; based on the type of data, it was qualitative; based on the data collection time, it was cross-sectional; and based on the data collection method and research methodology, it was a meta-synthesis in the qualitative section.

The statistical population in the first stage of the qualitative section (meta-synthesis) included all scientific articles and works available in domestic and international databases, as well as existing documents and regulations in this field. In this phase, 20 articles were selected through a purposive non-random sampling method based on the PRISMA guideline for article selection. The selection criteria in the meta-synthesis method included relevance to the research topic, recency, high scientific quality and credibility, retrieval from reputable domestic and international databases, appropriate methodology, and diversity in perspectives.

In the second phase (Delphi technique), the statistical population consisted of all academic experts (faculty members in the field of philosophy of education) and organizational specialists. Given that the minimum number of experts in a Delphi panel is typically between 10 and 18 (Linstone & Turoff, 2011), this study selected 25 interviewees using purposive non-random sampling. The criteria for selecting experts included a minimum of five years of teaching or study experience in related fields, holding a Ph.D. in philosophy of education, membership in an academic faculty, and sufficient expertise in the philosophical foundations of caring thinking or the Philosophy for Children (P4C) program, as demonstrated by their published articles, books, and research projects.

2.2. Data Collection

The data collection tool in the first phase of the qualitative section (meta-synthesis) was a systematic literature review of valid scientific sources. This process involved a precise and targeted search in scientific databases, articles, books, and dissertations relevant to the research topic. In the interview phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted. For preliminary assessment in individual interviews with participants, five interview questions were used, formulated based on the research topic and objectives.

In the content validity assessment of the meta-synthesis phase, it was confirmed that the examined concepts and content were comprehensively covered in the existing literature. To ensure this, articles were carefully selected and initially screened. A flowchart (depicting the search and selection process) was used for identifying appropriate articles within the studied domain. The screening process first established limitations regarding temporal scope (domestic and international), spatial coverage (domestic and international databases), research nature (synthesis, review, qualitative, and quantitative studies), and subject matter (based on keyword searches). Subsequently, both broad and detailed screening processes were performed.

Furthermore, the internal validity results indicated that the findings from the meta-synthesis were not influenced by external factors and were accurately interpreted. Additional validation measures included the use of a 27-item checklist based on the PRISMA model, independent analysis by the researcher and a statistical expert, Cohen's kappa coefficient to measure agreement, adherence to standard criteria, reproducibility (transparency in research execution), and MAXQDA software for precise tracking of data analysis and coding steps. The codes were reviewed, refined, and corrected by an expert in the subject matter to identify inconsistencies.

To ensure reliability in the meta-synthesis method, precise documentation of the research process, intra-researcher alignment, and inter-researcher alignment were used. Ultimately, the findings confirmed the reliability and validity of the data in the meta-synthesis phase.

In addition to these measures, the second phase of the qualitative study (Delphi technique) employed a Delphi worksheet. In this phase, experts were asked to not only rate

the indicators but also provide any suggestions or additional indicators they considered important. To ensure the validity of the Delphi worksheet, the questions were carefully designed to be simple, clear, and relevant. The questionnaire items were formulated in accessible and conceptually clear language to facilitate expert understanding. Prior to conducting the Delphi process, content validity was assessed using the content validity ratio (CVR) formula, confirming the comprehensiveness of the worksheet in covering the intended concepts. To determine reliability, internal and temporal consistency measures were used. The final results of the Delphi phase confirmed the validity and reliability of the Delphi worksheet.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data analysis method in the qualitative section was theoretical coding, derived from thematic analysis using MAXQDA software. Theoretical coding involves breaking down, conceptualizing, and systematically reconstructing data to develop theory based on empirical findings. This method consists of three core elements: "concepts," "categories," and "propositions."

In this approach, theory is constructed from "raw data." For analyzing the interview data and theoretical foundations, three types of coding were employed: basic themes, organizing themes, and global themes.

3. Findings and Results

In the conducted coding process (open, axial, and selective), basic themes were transformed into organizing themes, and organizing themes were further developed into global themes. Based on the study of theoretical foundations and research background, the dimensions, components, and indicators of the philosophical foundations of caring thinking from Matthew Lipman's perspective were examined and coded. The results are presented in the following table:

Table 1

Extracted Codes from Expert Interviews for Identifying Dimensions, Components, and Indicators of the Philosophical Foundations of Caring Thinking from Matthew Lipman's Perspective

| Category	Component	Meaning Unit	Source
Ontology	Awareness	"Awareness means knowing what is happening around you. One of the professors said: 'Awareness is the first step to changing anything in our lives.'"	I1, I20
	Acceptance and Non-resistance	"When we accept something, we no longer resist it. An education official stated: 'Accepting reality is the key to peace.'"	I7, I13, I21
	Focus on the Present Moment	"A philosophy professor said: 'If we focus on the present, we can enjoy life and experience less stress.'"	I15, I23
	Change in Perspective	"A faculty member remarked: 'A change in perspective can transform everything. We must learn to view issues with a positive outlook.'"	I8, I21
	Action	"Action means more than just talking. A policymaker noted: 'We must take action to see change happen.'"	I2, I11, I17
Anthropology	Personal Transformation	"A professor stated: 'Personal transformation means understanding oneself better and evolving. It is a long journey.'"	I9, I16
	Compassionate and Cautious Approach	"One of the professors mentioned: 'We should approach others with kindness while ensuring we protect our principles.'"	I16, I21
	Self-actualization	"Self-actualization means growth and progress. A policymaker said: 'We must pursue self-actualization to serve our society.'"	I10, I18, I25
Epistemology	Formation of Personal Identity	"A philosophy professor said: 'The formation of personal identity is crucial. We must understand ourselves to function better in society.'"	I3, I22
	Acceptance	"Acceptance means embracing everything as part of life. A faculty member stated: 'Acceptance brings us peace.'"	I17, I19
	Empathy	"Empathy means understanding others' emotions. A policymaker remarked: 'Without empathy, we cannot truly help others.'"	I11, I23
	Full Attention to Experience and Present Reality	"A professor stated: 'Focusing on present reality allows us to learn from our experiences and move forward.'"	I18, I24
Axiology	Self-awareness and Inner Understanding	"Self-awareness means knowing oneself. A faculty member noted: 'Understanding our inner state is the key to personal growth.'"	I4, I8, I24
	Mental Exercises	"A professor said: 'Mental exercises are like workouts for the brain. We need to train our minds daily to keep them strong.'"	I3, I12, I20
	Improvement of Social Relationships	"Improving relationships means better communication with others. A policymaker remarked: 'Good relationships make life more fulfilling.'"	I5, I8, I11

Increased Life Satisfaction	"Increasing satisfaction means being content with life. A professor noted: 'When we focus on positive aspects, our satisfaction grows.'"	I2, I13, I25
Changing Negative Patterns	"Changing negative patterns means eliminating bad habits. A faculty member stated: 'We must learn to think positively.'"	I6, I19, I23
Psychological Development	"Psychological development means enhancing our mental and emotional well-being. A professor said: 'This is a continuous process that requires attention.'"	I9, I14, I18

The theme network graphically represents the interconnections between themes. Based on the identified factors, the theme network for dimensions, components, and indicators of the philosophical foundations of caring thinking from Matthew Lipman's perspective, derived from expert interviews, is illustrated as follows:

Figure 1

Final Research Model
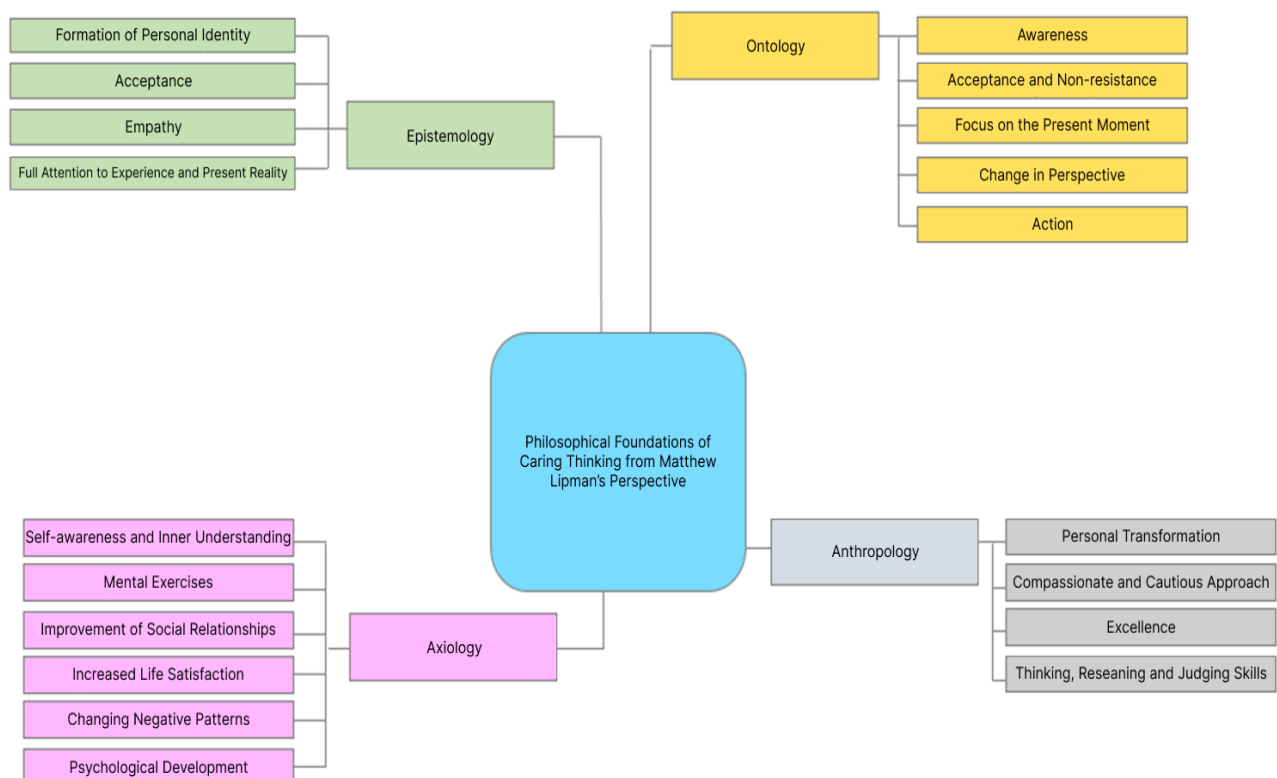
As illustrated in the above tables, the process of open, axial, and selective coding was conducted for the four main research questions in the qualitative phase of this study, resulting in 209 initial codes in the form of statements from interviewees, 32 subcategories, and ultimately 17 main categories. The integration process was carried out with careful consideration under the supervision of academic advisors and mentors. Based on these findings, the extracted and proposed model of this study is outlined in the next section, presenting 17 main categories.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings indicate that the axiological dimensions of caring thinking from Matthew Lipman's perspective include indicators such as philosophical mindset in thinking, philosophical dialogue in thinking, philosophical education in thinking, philosophical sharing of thinking, perception of thinking, understanding of caring thinking, knowledge of logical and correct thinking, comprehensiveness in thinking and adaptability, focused thinking, and conservative thinking. Each of these elements is further elaborated below:

Caring thinking has two meanings. It refers to an enthusiastic engagement with a subject that an individual contemplates, meaning that the person thinks about the topic

with passion, intrinsic concern, and a commitment to employing all their cognitive resources to explore solutions to that mental problem (Michaud & gregory, 2022; Vahedi & Kabiri, 2022; Wu, 2022).

A philosophical mindset is a deep and inquisitive approach to the world around us, pushing us beyond ordinary thinking. This type of thinking emphasizes questioning, doubt, and reflection on fundamental concepts of life, helping us gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of ourselves, the world, and our place within it. A philosophical mindset is characterized by continuous inquiry and insatiable curiosity. Individuals with this mindset do not accept ideas uncritically but instead seek deeper understanding of concepts, ideas, and beliefs. This mindset challenges us to question our assumptions and seek evidence and reasoning to support or refute them, encouraging reflection on experiences, thoughts, and emotions (Abdollahpour et al., 2019; Zulkifli & Hashim, 2020). Such reflection helps us better understand ourselves, examine our values and beliefs, and make more informed decisions about our lives. A philosophical mindset emphasizes rigorous analysis of information, reasoning, and complex concepts. Those who develop this mindset can critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of ideas and achieve a deeper understanding of issues, fostering an environment for innovative ideas and solutions. Through questioning, doubt, and reflection, we can break free from limited mental frameworks and access new and creative perspectives (Konstandinos, 2023; Lipman, 2023). This mindset enhances critical thinking skills, teaching us to scrutinize information, evaluate arguments, and resist false and misleading beliefs. It also improves communication skills by teaching us to express ourselves clearly, concisely, and persuasively while respectfully listening to others' viewpoints.

Philosophical dialogue, philosophical education, and caring thinking are interconnected concepts that work together to elevate thought processes and deepen our understanding of the world and our role within it. Philosophical dialogue involves rational, logical, and respectful discussions about philosophical issues. In these discussions, individuals encounter various perspectives and ideas, engage in intellectual challenges, and ultimately gain a more profound and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter (Oliveira, 2023; Ruitenburg et al., 2025). Philosophical dialogue plays a crucial role in fostering critical thinking, creativity, and empathy. Participation in such discussions enhances skills in reasoning, presenting and evaluating ideas, and understanding diverse viewpoints.

Philosophical education is an instructional process that encourages individuals to engage in philosophical thinking, deep inquiry, and exploration of fundamental concepts. This type of education aims to cultivate critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and informed decision-making (Lipman, 2003).

Creative thinking is a dynamic and multidimensional process that enables individuals to develop novel and innovative solutions to various issues. This type of thinking is based on knowledge of logical and correct thinking, comprehensiveness in thinking, and adaptability. This study examines each of these concepts and their deep interconnections.

Additionally, knowledge of logical and correct thinking forms the foundation of creative thinking. This knowledge allows individuals to critically analyze information, evaluate arguments, and gain a deeper and more precise understanding of issues. Logical thinking skills, such as analysis, reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making, serve as essential tools for creative thinking. By developing these skills, individuals can articulate their ideas clearly and logically, assess the strengths and weaknesses of different solutions, and arrive at the best possible decisions.

Comprehensiveness in thinking refers to considering diverse viewpoints, ideas, and information in the thought process. Individuals with comprehensive thinking seek a more profound and holistic understanding of issues and avoid being confined to a single perspective (Cam, 2023; Hedayati, 2018; Hosseini et al., 2021; Sharp, 2017). This type of thinking helps individuals overcome biases and prejudices, discover more creative solutions, and communicate more effectively with others.

Adaptability is the ability to adjust approaches, ideas, and solutions in response to new circumstances. Flexible individuals can adapt to various challenges and obstacles while seeking new and innovative solutions. In today's complex and ever-changing world, this skill is of paramount importance. By developing adaptability, individuals can become more resilient to change, seize new opportunities, and progress toward success.

In caring thinking, these three concepts are deeply interconnected, each playing a complementary role in the creative thinking process. Knowledge of logical and correct thinking provides a framework for creative and innovative thinking, comprehensiveness in thinking allows individuals to consider multiple perspectives, and adaptability enables

them to navigate various challenges and obstacles (Saritepeci & Yildiz Durak, 2024; Zhengye, 2023).

Focused thinking and conservative thinking represent two distinct approaches to thought, each playing a specific role in the cognitive process. Understanding these concepts and their relationship with caring thinking helps individuals become deeper, more aware, and more responsible thinkers.

Focused thinking refers to the ability to concentrate deeply and precisely on a specific subject or idea. In this type of thinking, all thoughts and attention are directed toward a particular topic, aiming for a more profound and comprehensive understanding. Focused thinking is an essential skill for learning, problem-solving, and decision-making. Developing this skill helps individuals avoid distractions, enhance their concentration, and achieve better results.

Conservative thinking, on the other hand, involves a tendency to maintain the status quo and resist change. Individuals with conservative thinking traditionally adhere to proven ideas and solutions, approaching new and innovative ideas with caution. This type of thinking plays a crucial role in maintaining stability and order in society. Through conservative thinking, individuals can prevent unintended consequences from sudden and unplanned changes.

Caring thinking is a dynamic and multidimensional process that enables individuals to gain a deeper understanding of the world and their role within it. Within this process, both focused thinking and conservative thinking are essential. Focused thinking helps individuals concentrate on a subject and achieve a more profound understanding, while conservative thinking allows them to critically evaluate new and innovative ideas and mitigate potential negative consequences.

Overall, the findings of this study align with previous research (Cam, 2023; Eftekhari et al., 2023; Franzini Tibaldeo, 2023; Hosseini et al., 2021; Konstandinos, 2023; Lipman, 2023; Meymanatabadi, 2023; Oliveira, 2023; Ruitenburg et al., 2025; Saritepeci & Yildiz Durak, 2024; Tavakoli et al., 2023; Zhengye, 2023).

One of the primary limitations of this study was that the statistical population was restricted to scientific documents, including specialized books, conducted research, dissertations, and articles related to the philosophical foundations of caring thinking from Matthew Lipman's perspective and its educational implications. These materials were obtained from scientific databases and academic and organizational experts. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing the study's findings.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that similar studies be conducted using quantitative methodologies to compare results with those obtained in this study. Additionally, while this study sought the opinions of academic and organizational experts regarding the identified indicators for the philosophical foundations of caring thinking from Lipman's perspective and its educational implications, future research should extend surveys to other groups such as parents, schoolteachers, and other stakeholders.

Authors' Contributions

This article is derived from the first author's doctoral dissertation. All authors significantly contributed to this study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent.

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