



ESP educators in the post-pandemic e-environments: Teaching Presence and English for IT

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Abstract: *The Covid-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the educational landscape, since an almost immediate switch to online learning was the only way to keep education moving and bridge the physical distance between teacher and students. Technology has permeated every aspect of teaching to the extent where there is no going back to the "before the pandemic", therefore, in the post-pandemic times, a number of higher education institutions has introduced a policy that hybrid mode of instruction has become a "new normal". The instructor's role in hybrid teaching appears vital, so educators must amalgamate the advantages of online instructions with the goals relevant to face-to-face teaching. Teaching Presence, as an overarching aspect of Community of Inquiry (CoI) that incorporates the course design, facilitation and organization, can significantly affect learning outcomes and course satisfaction. Within the CoI framework, the paper investigates students' (n=83) assessment of Teaching Presence and satisfaction with the English for IT course. The study adopted an exploratory mixed-method research design and the data were collected through an online questionnaire. The findings of the research indicate that students highly rated the Teaching Presence in the course English for IT, and that there was a positive correlation between Teaching Presence and Satisfaction.*

Keywords: *Community of Inquiry, Teaching Presence, English for Specific Purposes, Satisfaction, Tertiary Education*

1. INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic was marked by the general idea that mere continuation of education was what was essential, whereas recommendations to invest time and energy in additional effort to support student achievement and learning satisfaction were tentative and seemed insignificant when compared to the ongoing global threat. In those circumstances, as the related research suggests, teachers were mainly interested in just delivering their courses anyhow (as they were not trained and, reportedly, had poor digital literacy), being unaware of whether the learning outcomes had been achieved at all [1].

However, things dramatically changed in the post-pandemic period when a number of universities still opted for hybrid or online modes of course delivery, which in the post-pandemic period could not be denoted Emergency Remote Teaching English Language Teaching [2], but defined as courses deliberately re-designed to be delivered online (initially f-2-f courses that were hastily adapted for online delivery and then with smaller adjustments proceeded with online/hybrid mode of delivery). As

the potential benefits of online instruction during the pandemic were estimated as substantial, it was expected that in the post-pandemic period universities would try to work out its downsides and implement novel instructional strategies to secure better results. Drawing upon the experiences from the Emergency Remote English Language Teaching (ERELT) [1], [3], the educational focus has now been shifted to establishing more-meaningful and successful instruction in the e-environment. Through indicators of course quality, opportunities for improvement were called for across various disciplines, one of them being English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Next to meeting specific needs of learners and focusing on the appropriate language, one of the absolute characteristics of ESP refers to its making use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves [4]. Following the quantum leap forward that the technology took, in the context of English for IT during the ERELT this has reached a literal level, since the teachers had to delve into the very core of the discipline, and master the technology necessary for online lecture delivery, which the students mostly felt more familiar with than their language teachers.

The post-pandemic education will, arguably, require ESP teachers to be fluent in using both teaching modalities – online and offline, as expectations have significantly increased for distance education. In that sense, Teaching Presence (TP) as a conceptual aspect derived from the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, appears as a critical component of e-teaching that can significantly improve the instructional setting and enhance the learning experience, or as Gurley aptly puts it “Course quality is influenced by teaching presence” [5]. As establishing Teaching Presence emerges mainly as an effort of a lecturer/instructor, more scholarly attention should be paid to investigating to what extent TP affects e-learning and students’ satisfaction.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. CoI and Teaching Presence

Over the past few decades, following the rise of technology which subsequently opened new possibilities for online education, scholars have sought to create updated models of a learning process in e-environments, which would formalize the available research on teaching and learning and, at the same time, capture the novelties and uniqueness of the online medium. Community of Inquiry (CoI), first introduced by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer in 2000 [6] was one of the models that has generated avid interest from the researchers dealing with online learning.

Designed to assist educators and guide and facilitate online learning, CoI framework is best understood as the interconnection of three presences, cognitive, social and teaching, which have to be established if “a worthwhile educational experience” [6] is to occur. In other words, as Swan in [7] argues, appropriately designed, encouraged and carried out interactions between these presences, i.e. instructional content, students and instructors, result in achieving effective online learning outcomes. While cognitive presence refers to the ability of learners “to construct meaning through sustained communication” [6], social presence is mostly defined as the capacity of the participants in e-environments to present themselves as “real people” [6], [8]. Teaching presence can be broadly identified as the virtual “visibility” of a teacher/instructor in an e-learning environment, as perceived by students [9]. Garrison et al. posited it as “the binding element in creating a community of inquiry” and “essential in balancing cognitive and social issues” [6]. They even further highlighted the importance of Teaching Presence by claiming that when online education fails, “it is usually because there has not been a responsible teaching presence” [6]. However, this concept has been the least researched among the three presences [9], [10].

In order to establish their successful online presence, instructors must develop consistent patterns of interaction, promote accessible communication, provide consistent and meaningful feedback, moderate discussions effectively, and demonstrate content expertise [10]. Furthermore, they should identify and clarify areas of confusion, correct misinformation appearing in discussions and online posts, move the discussion along and focus it on the topic, all the way encouraging students to participate. According to [11], Teaching Presence even begins before the course commences as the teacher plans and prepares the course, and it continues during the course.

All of these activities can be gathered under three core elements of Teaching Presence, which are discerned from its most widely used definition, offered by Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer in 2001, which posits it as “the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” [11]. The first element, instructional design and organization, refers to the decisions that instructors have to make regarding course objectives, curriculum, teaching materials, etc. If the instructor clearly communicates the learning outcomes and ensures a strong connection between activities and assessment, the students will navigate the course more efficiently and construct meaning from the materials offered more successfully.

The second element in which the instructor also plays a crucial role is the facilitation of discourse, prompting students to actively participate in the discussions that challenge, personalize and expand on learning materials. The instructors should set the climate for productive discourse, raise apposite questions, encourage students’ contributions and help them reach consensus [12]. However, teachers should restrain from being overly present so as to reinforce cooperation among students (see [13]).

Finally, direct instructional activities refer to coherent content presentation, the interjection of comments, providing students with the resources, and evaluative activities done by the teacher, such as assessment and feedback. As Bernard et al. in [14] point out, direct instruction does not have to be synchronous, as the asynchronous approach often results in better student achievement.

2.2. Previous Research

Since student satisfaction is basically defined as “a concept that reflects outcomes and reciprocity that occur between students and an instructor” [15], the relationship between Teaching Presence and satisfaction with the online course has triggered the interest of researchers ever since the concept of CoI was first introduced. Khalid and Quick in [16] analyzed the correlation between Teaching

Presence and students' satisfaction, though not in the language learning context. The results suggested a significantly positive correlation between the two variables. That the Teaching Presence is a strong predictor of students' satisfaction is also confirmed by the studies of Akyol and Garrison [17] and Kyei-Blankson et al. [18]; although they investigated the whole CoI framework, yielding differing results. For example, the survey conducted in [17] proved significant relationships between all three presences and satisfaction, where Teaching Presence followed Cognitive Presence which was shown to have slightly stronger relationship with satisfaction, while [18] showed that learners perceive Teaching Presence as the most influential factor in achieving their learning outcomes and satisfaction.

When it comes to language learning, CoI framework was discussed by Diaz and Miy (2017) [19], regarding the development of oral skill in online English courses. Their findings revealed that it is the "teaching presence itself that showed a connection with the grammar, accuracy, and vocabulary indicators of oral skill". The study of Puranen and Vurdien (2020) [20] examined how the students' perceptions on feedback and Teaching Presence in online ELT courses differ from those of teachers, and how TP influences students' engagement and behavior in online courses.

Although the Covid19 outbreak and shift to online education intensified the research regarding the presences within CoI framework, the studies exploring the Teaching Presence in online language learning still remain scarce. Ghaemi (2021) investigated the ways in which Teaching Presence affected EFL learners' perceptions of cognitive and social presences in online EFL courses and found significant correlation between the three variables [21]. Morales, Frenzen and Bravo (2022) "sought to evaluate how much of a mediating factor online teaching presence could be in the context of test preparation within a language course" [22]. Although their results indicated that TP is perceived as a relevant aspect of online learning experience, they also warned against possible challenges that hinder the expected benefits of online language learning. Nagdhipour and Manca (2022) explored the features of Teaching presence in students' WhatsApp groups "for designing, facilitating, and guiding cognitive and social processes conducive to their language learning" [23]. Krsmanović et al. (2022) investigated the relation between social presence and students' satisfaction in online ESP course and found out that students' satisfaction "was mainly due to the teachers' successful guidance" [3], which indicated the need for further studies regarding Teaching Presence.

Finally, there is evidence that Teaching Presence is a strong predictor of cognitive presence and social presence. In the Sen-akbulut et al. research

conducted during the pandemic at a Turkish university, 745 students highly evaluated courses in which Teaching Presence was high despite the fact that Social Presence and Cognitive Presence were rated as low [24]. On the other hand, other research indicates that the researcher/instructor's efforts to create a greater sense of Teaching Presence were not an effective use of her time and energy, as the findings demonstrate minimally significant differences between student grades and the criteria of the instructor evaluations [25]. This discrepancy implies that more research needs to be conducted that examines Teaching Presence in different contexts, ESP being one of them. Moreover, although the available research mostly highlights the importance of Teaching Presence in ELT, its role in students' satisfaction with the online ESP courses and the ways to establish it are yet to be explored, and this study attempts to address the indicated gap.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was designed as an exploratory mixed-method study. Quantitative and qualitative data were used to explore learners' perceptions of Teaching Presence and their satisfaction with the course.

The study seeks to address the following research questions and test the following hypotheses:

RQ1: What is the perception of IT students of the Teaching Presence during the English for IT course?

RQ2: Is there a correlation between the perceived Teaching Presence and Satisfaction of the students who attended the English for IT course?

Hypothesis 1: IT students have positive attitudes toward the Teaching Presence during the English for IT course and are satisfied with the course.

Hypothesis 2: There is a correlation between Teaching Presence and satisfaction of the students who attended the English for IT course.

Using the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, this study aims at examining learners' perceptions of the Teaching Presence in the English for IT course that they attended at the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Čačak, Serbia.

The data were collected through a survey instrument which comprised 2 sections: 1) the Community of Inquiry questionnaire developed by Arbaugh et al. [26] which was further validated by Yang and Su [27], and 2) a questionnaire adapted from the Collaborative Learning, Social Presence and Satisfaction questionnaire developed by So and Brush (2008) [28] and further adapted by Pritchett et al. (2014) [29]. The wording of the questionnaire was slightly changed and translated into Serbian. Finally, the questionnaire ended with 4 open-ended questions designed by the researchers.

Upon the completion of the English for IT course (which correlates with the treatment), a questionnaire was administered to the participants who volunteered for this study. The first section of the questionnaire is the CoI instrument, consisting of 3 demography questions, 13 statements with a 5-point Likert scale related to Teaching Presence, and 11 questions with a 5-point Likert scale related to Satisfaction. The following range of Means with its descriptions was used: 1.00 – 1.44 = strongly disagree, 1.45 – 2.44 = disagree, 2.45 – 3.44 = neutral, 3.45 – 4.44 = agree, and 4.45 – 5.00 = strongly agree. The reliability of the scale for the instrument was determined by the Cronbach Alpha's Coefficient, with the result of 0.95, which indicates significant consistency. The second part consisted of 4 open-ended questions.

Data were collected through the Google Forms tool. For the CoI part of the research, a software package SPSS and descriptive statistics were utilized for obtaining and describing the results. The items of the questionnaire were then grouped into two categories related to Teaching Presence and Satisfaction respectively and Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was utilized to analyze the relationship between the two. Finally, for the open-ended questions, a Thematic Analysis (TA) of the responses was conducted.

3.1. Course description and the sample

The course English for IT was held in the summer semester of 2022 in a hybrid model. Out of the total of 15 teaching weeks (3 hours per week), only three weeks were held as in-person instruction (the first - welcome week, the mid-term week, and the final week). The course was delivered via MS Teams platform, and it incorporated both synchronous and asynchronous online communication. The course had elements of Project-based learning and in terms of course preparation and instruction, the lecturer was guided by Fiock's recommendation on how to successfully establish Teaching Presence [13]. The assessment was completely carried out in person.

The convenience sample of the study consisted of 83 undergraduate students of Information Technology. As for demography, among the respondents, 48.2% were male, while 49.4% were female, and 2.2% did not reveal their gender. In terms of age, 24.1% were between 17 and 20 years old, 69.9% were between 20-25 years old, and 6% were older than 25. The respondents also self-assessed their computer skills; 61.4% believe that they have an intermediate level of knowledge, 33.7% believe that they are advanced, and 4.8% think they are beginners.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first part of the questionnaire referred to the Teaching Presence established during the online English course as perceived by the students of IT, and it was divided in three sections which analyzed three core indicators of Teaching Presence: Design and Organization (4 statements), Facilitation (6 statements) and Direct Instructions (3 statements). The results (Table 1) indicate that the students strongly agreed with almost all of the statements.

The highest score was given to the statement reading "The instructor provided clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities" (M=4.74), followed by the statements regarding the instructor's clear communication of both important course topics and course goals (M=4.73). All three of the statements belong to the first section of TP scale, which refers to the Design and organization of the course, which, when all the scores are combined together, has the highest mean value (M=4.73) among the three sections. It is followed by the section labeled "Direct instructions" with the overall mean value M=4.66. The statements in this section referred to the timely and appropriate feedback provided by the instructor. Although assessed with the lowest overall mean value (M=4.57), all but one statement regarding the facilitation of the discourse belong to the 'strongly agree' range.

The ninth statement ("The instructor encouraged course participants to explore new concepts in this course") was the only one with the mean value slightly below 4.5 (M=4.42). These findings are compliant with those of Saadatmand whose sample also had greater Teaching Presence scores in Design & organization and facilitation segments of the scale [30].

The second part of the questionnaire deals with the students' satisfaction with the ESP course delivered via MS Teams. While almost all of the responses in the first part of the questionnaire belong to the strongly agree range, the situation is slightly different with the responses in the second part, since they are distributed within three ranges (Table 2): while the respondents assessed only two items as those they strongly agree with, the majority of the responses belongs to the agree range, with only one item that the respondents disagree with.

Table 1. Teaching Presence scale, descriptive statistics

Statement	Mean	St. dev.
Design & Organization	4.73	0.53
1. The instructor clearly communicated important course topics.	4.73	0.66
2. The instructor clearly communicated important course goals.	4.73	0.65
3. The instructor provided clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities.	4.74	0.51
4. The instructor clearly communicated important dates/time frames for learning activities.	4.72	0.59
Facilitation	4.57	0.59
5. The instructor was helpful in identifying areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics that helped me to learn.	4.60	0.66
6. The instructor was helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helped me clarify my thinking.	4.72	0.65
7. The instructor helped to keep the course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.	4.61	0.73
8. The instructor helped keep the course participants on task in a way that helped me to learn.	4.59	0.66
9. The instructor encouraged course participants to explore new concepts in this course.	4.42	0.84
10. Instructor's actions reinforced the development of a sense of community among course participants.	4.49	0.82
Direct instructions	4.66	0.58
11. The instructor helped to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helped me to learn.	4.62	0.66
12. The instructor provided feedback that helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses relative to the course's goals and objectives.	4.71	0.69
13. The instructor provided feedback in a timely fashion.	4.66	0.61

The highest score (M=4.53) was given to the first statement which reads "Overall, I am satisfied with the teacher's guidance during the discussion". This is followed by the statement "Overall, I am satisfied with the communication during the MS Teams English classes" whose mean value was also above 4.45, which indicates that the students also strongly agreed with the way the communication was managed during online English classes.

Furthermore, the students agreed that they were able to learn through the CMC, that they are satisfied with what they learned in the online English language course in general and with what they learned from class discussions, and that the communication was a useful learning experience.

They also agreed that the diversity of topics in the discussions encouraged their participation in them and that they were stimulated to do additional readings or research about the topic discussed during online lectures, although the score for the latter statement was slightly below 4 (M=3.92). Similar score (M=3.93) was given to the statement regarding the students' willingness to participate in a similar course in the future, as a result of their experience with this English course.

The only statement that the students disagreed with is related to their investment of effort to learn CMC skills (e.g., how to use MS Teams) to participate in the classes, which was expected due to the results of their self-assessed knowledge of the computer skills in the demographic part of the questionnaire, and due to the fact that they are the students of the Information Technology study program, so they already possess certain digital skills.

When it comes to the relationship between the two main variables investigated in the study, the findings indicate that there is a moderate positive significant correlation between Teaching Presence and Satisfaction ($r=0.524^{**}$, $p=.000$). By the results obtained using Pearson's correlation, the higher the students' value the Teaching Presence (M=4.64) the higher their Satisfaction (M=4.02) with the online ESP course appears to be. This is in line with the previous findings of Khalid and Quick [16] and Caskurlu et al. [31] that TP significantly predicts the degree of students' satisfaction, and that there is a correlation between TP and satisfaction.

Table 2. Satisfaction scale, descriptive statistics

Statement	Mean	St. dev.
1. Overall, I am satisfied with the teacher's guidance during the discussion.	4.53	0.77
2. I was able to learn through the medium of computer-mediated communication.	4.25	0.92
3. The communication was a useful learning experience.	4.08	1.19
4. I was stimulated to do additional readings or research about the topic discussed during MS Teams sessions.	3.92	1.19
5. Overall, I am satisfied with what I learned in the English language course through MS Teams.	4.39	0.96
6. Overall, I am satisfied with the communication during the MS Teams English classes.	4.45	0.99
7. I was able to learn from the MS Teams class discussions.	4.22	1.03
8. The diversity of topics in this discussion prompted me to participate in the discussion.	4.30	0.96
9. My level of learning that took place in the discussion was of the highest quality.	4.02	1.07
10. I put in a great deal of effort to learn computer-mediated communication skills (e.g., how to use MS Teams) to participate in the classes.	2.15	1.32
11. As a result of my experience with MS Teams in the English course, I would like to participate in another discussion in the future.	3.93	1.43

Table 3 presents the correlations between individual TP indicators and satisfaction. All correlations belong to the moderate positive range (the highest one being between satisfaction and facilitation ($r=0.558^{**}$, $p=.000$)).

Table 3. TP-satisfaction correlation data

	Design and organization	Facilitation	Direct Instruction
Satisfaction	0.410 ^{**}	0.558 ^{**}	0.436 ^{**}
Design and organization	1	0.830 ^{**}	0.690 ^{**}
Facilitation		1	0.785 ^{**}
^{**} $p<0.01$			

The results of the qualitative part of the questionnaire (responses to 4 open-ended questions) are presented in Table 4. The students were asked to write down what was badly/poorly organized during the course and discuss what the teacher could have done to better support their learning experience and satisfaction. By applying Thematic Analysis, we have grouped the responses based on their frequency of appearance in the respondents' answers.

Table 4. Thematic analysis, questions 1-4

What did you like the most about the way this course was organized and facilitated?	What did you like the least about the way this course was organized and facilitated?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Interaction (12 responses) -Flexibility (9 responses) -The teacher's commitment (9 responses) -Regular homework assignments and the teacher's feedback (9 responses) -A pleasant and relaxed atmosphere (7 responses) -Course management (in terms of time, instruction, mode of delivery) (2 responses) -The fact that everyone actively participated in the discussions (2 responses) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Technical issues (poor Internet connection, equipment malfunction etc.) (18 responses) -Lack of f-2-2 contact (9 responses) -Students unwilling to participate (did not want to turn on their cameras) (2 responses)
What are the things the instructor did to support your learning in the e-environment?	What are the things the instructor could have done to better support your learning in the e-environment?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Relaxed atmosphere (11 responses) -The teacher's motivation, engagement and good mood (9 responses) -Regular homework and the feedback (9 responses) -Interaction/collaboration (3 responses) -The teacher's encouraging us to participate/prompting us to discuss (2 responses) -Variety of discussion topics (2 responses) -The teacher always met the needs of the students (1 response) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -It would have been more efficient if the groups had been smaller (1 response) -To criticize students more often (1 response) -To upload more pdf material on the platform (1 response)

The findings reveal that students were quite aware of the instructional strategies their teacher deployed in online classes to build a strong Teaching Presence, so they mention the teacher's commitment/enthusiasm to guide the interaction, their class management skills, flexibility and providing feedback (9 responses and more). The respondents elicited the teacher's activities that, by

their assessment, supported their learning experience such as; setting a relaxed working atmosphere, prompting everybody to engage/participate, showing motivation to collaborate, offering a variety of topics for discussion.

As key downsides of the process, the respondents mentioned only a few issues; class size, the teacher's attitude towards students, and inadequate handling handouts, but due to the small number of responses (1 response each), they are not relevant. To conclude, the qualitative analysis has showcased that the respondents felt the instructor managed to establish a strong Teaching Presence in the English for IT course.

The findings of both the quantitative and the qualitative parts of the research imply that both Hypotheses of the study are confirmed; IT students have had positive attitudes toward the Teaching Presence during the English for IT course, and there is a correlation between Teaching Presence and satisfaction.

5. CONCLUSION

While the pandemic shows signs of ebbing (does it really?), educational institutions share cautious optimism that teaching will approach some semblance of normalcy. However, after having been thrust into virtual instruction for almost two years, which has, undoubtedly, become what is now called "new normal", educators have acknowledged a paradigmatic shift in e-pedagogy that will not disappear once the pandemic really loosens its grip. Hybrid sort of instruction is what, arguably, is here to stay. Post-pandemic education must benefit from both online and in-person teaching, offering an educational experience that educates both holistically and flexibly, and that strategically prepares students to engage with a rapidly changing world.

Our findings support the assertion that educators in tertiary education in the post-pandemic period need to enhance their academic practices by utilizing not only innovative tools but also by improving instructional strategies so as to establish a strong Teaching Presence in their e-environments. In that way, challenges caused by ERELТ will be addressed, and online or hybrid learning will come at least one step closer to the significance and quality that face-2-face teaching is reported to have.

Within the CoI framework, we investigated how students assessed Teaching Presence within the English for IT course they attended, and whether there was a correlation between Teaching Presence and course satisfaction. The research findings of our study showed that the respondents had high perceptions of the Teaching Presence in the English for IT course, and that Teaching Presence was

successfully established by the instructor. The results also yielded significant relationships between Teaching Presence and satisfaction, as we found a positive correlation between TP and satisfaction: the higher the students' value the Teaching Presence the higher their course Satisfaction. These findings indicate that the teacher's conscious effort to establish and nurture TP through a mindful instructional design in an e-environment was acknowledged by the students, as they elicited some of the instructional strategies they benefited from, which further suggests that ESP instructors should prioritize course planning long before it is facilitated.

As for the practical implications of this study, these findings might provide useful guidelines for ESP teachers on how to build a strong Teaching Presence in e-environments and achieve greater student satisfaction. This research might also encourage policymakers to foster initiatives that will support ESP instructors to further broaden their digital literacy competence so that it includes enhanced Teaching Presence skills, which will, overall, accelerate a transition to a more flexible and sustainable education. Tertiary education policymakers, in particular, must invest in faculty development by providing additional training programs that will empower them to re-think the existing e-pedagogies and move toward more meaningful, socially engaged and fulfilling e-learning experiences they design and/or facilitate.

The pandemic has taught us that we have to further conceptualize collaborative online learning and address its specificity by expanding our knowledge of its shortcomings and potentials. It appears that the role of educators when online is more delicate than when in f-2-f instruction, due to the fact that in the e-space instructors have to make additional effort to compensate for the obvious lacks of socio-emotional dimensions and rich-in-cues communication that is characteristic of f-2-f instruction. In other words, broadly speaking, our post-pandemic educational mission is to call for joint efforts in training a new generation of ESP educators who will acquire upgraded e-teaching skills. By becoming upskilled educators, we would, arguably, take actions to prevent so-called "educational claustrophobia – a state of learners perceiving the educational process as worthless or confined, inadequate to enable their full personal and social development" [32].

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