

## **The Discrepancy between High School GPA and Qiyas Results among Saudi High School Students**

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates the reasons behind the discrepancy between the high school GPA and the Qiyas test results of the high school students in KSA. To this end the researchers interview the people concerned including educators, principals, teachers and students who have recently graduated. Their answers to questions related to the reasons of discrepancy are filtered and tabulated for analysis. The results show that most of the interviewees' answers refer the reasons for discrepancy to the lenient and unprofessional way schools run the final exams. The interviewees add that these exams do not go through certain procedures like tables of specifications, Bloom taxonomy, validity, reliability and piloting. Teachers' desire to help students get very high grades leads them to minimizing a whole book to few pages, avoiding challenging questions and following a lenient way of proctoring. The result is a feeble exam that does not guarantee the least levels of predictive validity to compete with Qiyas tests that are prepared and monitored professionally by experts. The study recommends that preparing and managing final exams should be done by the Ministry of Education where the schools' job is only to cover syllabuses and prepare students through mock exams and training.*

**Key words:** *discrepancy, GPA, high school, KSA, Qiyas tests, Saudi students*

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### **I. Introduction**

Students in many countries usually sit for national examinations to join higher education institutions like colleges, universities, institutes, training centers, military sectors, etc. They may also do international exams like SAT, GRE, GMAT, TOEFL or IELTS. These exams are usually preconditions to limit the number of applicants to match the capacity of universities and to decide the priorities for highly demanded fields like medicine, engineering, dentistry, pharmacology...etc. Whether to consider the high school Graduate Performance Average (GPA) or the international exam results as indicators for the predictive validity in colleges and universities is still controversial among educators (Espenshade & Chung, 2010 [1]). Ten years ago, Saudi Arabia universities started to consider the high school GPA as a criterion for joining educational institutions and giving priority to different faculties at these institutions. Unfortunately, the high school grades show an unreliable criterion as they lack the predictive validity which make them unauthoritative inside and outside the kingdom. The problem is partially solved inside the kingdom by introducing the foundation year at its universities where the students take certain general courses and sit for final exams. The average of the results of these exams is used as a criterion for joining different faculties. Students who used to go outside KSA to finish their post graduate studies used to suffer from the lack of trust in their high school averages. Some countries used to deduct ten grades of their average and some others used to ask students to sit for an entrance exam. The National Center for Assessment (Qiyas) in Saudi Arabia responds to this dilemma by introducing two tests: The General Aptitude Test (GAT) and the Scholastic Achievement Admission Test (Science). The achievement test covers five important courses usually required in students' undergraduate studies and the aptitude test covers the students' abilities in mathematics and Arabic language. The average of these two tests in addition to the high school GPA is now recognized as the main criterion for acceptance at universities inside and outside the kingdom. However, a source of disappointment that disturbs this convenient solution is the discrepancy between Qiyas tests results and the high school GPA.

This study tries to answer these two questions:

- What are the reasons behind the discrepancy between high school GPA and Qiyas tests results?
- How can educators in KSA control and minimize this discrepancy?

## **II. Review of literature**

### **2.1. Shortage of literature in KSA**

Unfortunately, little literature is available about discrepancies between high school tests and standardized tests concerning using them as a predictive measurement for university admission. To the best knowledge of the researchers no studies (except for Alwahibee's, 2015 [2]) were carried out in KSA which tried to investigate such discrepancies. The study used a placement test (not a well-known standardized one) which was very limited to a specific field of study (studying English literature) using a small sample. It came up with very limited results as well. The results were in favor of group B students whose performance was based on the placement test other than the high school GPA as the case in group A. It is worth mentioning that in some countries like KSA and other Gulf states the school GPA is not trusted as a reliable predictor for students' success at college especially outside these countries.

### **2.2. Standardized tests and GPA, a negotiable issue**

It is very common and to the best interests of higher education institutions all over the world to demand standardized tests scores as a requirement for admission and to evaluate exactly the candidate's ability to succeed at the institute (Gutmann, 1987 [3]). Organizations hope to expect the first semester school GPA because pupils who fail during the first semester of school frequently fail to endure on toward completion (Astin, 1993 [4]; Tinto, 1993 [5]). However, there are some specialists who are against such tests and are in favor of relying on school tests. In the United States, SAT and ACT are required to determine the academic readiness in college; whereas in Britain and few other countries a certain average in IELTS or GRE test is required. These tests are questioned as a valid reflection of students' academic performance (Kwon, 2015 [6]). The opponents of standardized tests claim that the school GPA is a better predictor for students' performance at the university level. State (2012 [7]) states that, eventually, recent classwork performance is what helps a student get ready for undergraduate studies admission. Wooldridge (2014 [8]) says criticsers believe that SAT test places minorities at a drawback in school admissions, but without it students would do even worse. It is clear that this issue is negotiable and needs more research especially in KSA.

In their study Noble and Sawyer (2002 [9]) compare the efficiency of ACT test composite score and high school GPA for expecting changed stages of first-year school GPA. The main result is that both high school GPA and ACT composite score are active in expecting accomplishment at low stages of first-year GPA; high college GPA is slightly more precise than ACT composite score at these stages. High college GPA is not an active interpreter of accomplishment at advanced stages of first-year GPA, yet ACT composite score predictions, in contrast, are active at all first-year GPA stages. Geiser and Santelices (2007 [10]) study the reliability of high school GPA as a criterion for college admission. The study also refutes the conventional view that standardized tests are better for this purpose. The results of the study expose that the high college GPA is the strongest predictor for four years at college in all subjects. Niu and Tienda (2009 [11]) investigate the predictive power of college success through studying two key indicators used by college admission offices. These key indicators are high school class rank and standardized test scores. The main result of the study is that high school class rank is a better interpreter of school performance than standardized test scores. Hernandez (2015 [12]) comes up with the result that both GPA and standardized test scores are valuable correlates of Undergraduate Baccalaureate Program students' outcomes. However, standardized test scores outperformed GPA on nearly all success indicators in a sample size total (n=246) of nursing students. By means of organizational facts for five Texas universities that vary in selectivity.

The recent study tries to go deep and specify the reasons behind the discrepancies between high school GPA and Qiyas tests results which as a result can help educators in KSA control and minimize these discrepancies. What gives more importance to this study is that it does not stop at the limits of the final results but tries to understand the validity of these results and identify the causes behind them.

### **2.3. The entrance examination, the high school GPA and the academic performance following admission**

Two criteria, the entering examination scores and the high school GPA, regarding their correlation with the academic performance usually exchange focus and weight in many universities and academic institutions. The research in these criteria shows varying points of view about which criterion is more reliable in deciding the predictive validity of students' success after admission.

Myers and Pyles (1992 [13]) assesses the usefulness of using the American ACT test and the high school GPA as interpreters for students' performance at college. The practice of both the ACT test score and the high school results would overwhelm the oppositions to using only the ACT test score, which itself is not a good interpreter of school accomplishment for many minority pupils. Erguven (2012 [14]) tries to decide on a clear criterion to receive students to both the Faculty of Computer Technology and Engineering and to the Faculty of Business and Management. He finds and compares connection between the results of the entrance exam and the GPA of university certificate of the graduates of the two faculties. Among previous academic accomplishment

measures, university exam results were observed to expect graduate students' GPA. The connection and regression investigation show that there is low optimistic connection between university entry exam score and university GPA. He et al (2015 [15]) conduct a study to compare students' entrance exam results for a school and their post exam results at college to discuss the possibility for using filtering tests and recommendations for new students. The results show substantial connection between the English entrance exam scores and the academic performance in many subjects, whereas the mathematics entrance test shows negative significance. Preradovic and Kasic-Jeremic (2015 [16]) study the results of the entrance exam for Banja Luka university students who applied for the faculty of architecture, civil engineering and geodesy. Their achievement in math and physics is analyzed related to attendance in the preparation year and their high school GPA. The authors recommend improving the teaching of math and physics at school through syllabus changes. They also recommend analyzing the university GPA in relation to the type of school. Moreover, they suggest meeting instructors in technical/vocational schools to see the topics or parts that pupils find difficult at the university. Koretz et al (2016 [17]) explore the connection between high school tests and the college admission tests regarding expecting accomplishment at college. The results of the math and physics tests show that the choice of test had trivial effect on the prediction of freshman GPA.

It is clear through the research with regard to using the high school GPA and the entrance exams as criteria for accepting students at universities that the school achievement is more critical in predicting students' achievement after admission. School programs and teaching strategies have to be reconsidered to offer better preparation for students especially in math, physics and English language.

### III. Methodology

#### 3.1. Population and sample of the study

The population of the study is all the people involved in the high school tests and Qiyas tests (males and females) in KSA including the people working in the directorates of education, the principals of high schools, the teachers at high schools, and finally and most importantly the students who finished high school. The sample of the study consists of three males and three females from each of the categories mentioned in the population. This sample is an intended one as not many people have clear idea about these types of tests and are able to talk about them from an educational point of view.

#### 3.2. Research design

To collect data about the types of tests students are required to do as prerequisites for joining the university, to identify the nature of these tests in terms of content, validity and reliability, and to recognize the real reasons behind the discrepancy that is very apparent among these tests, a group of eleven questions was prepared for these purposes. Nearly twelve people individually answered these questions and their answers were filtered and summarized then tabulated for later analysis.

### IV. Results

#### 4.1. Discrepancy between high school GPA and Qiyas tests

To show the clear discrepancy between high school GPA and Qiyas tests, Table 1 and Chart 1 below presented the results of a random sample of preparation year students in the Faculty of Engineering at King Abdulaziz University.

**Table 1. The results of high school GPA and Qiyas tests of a random sample of students from the preparation year in the Faculty of Engineering at King Abdulaziz University**

No.	Name	GPA	Qiyas Tests	
			GAT Test	Science Test
1	Faisal Al-Ghamdy	95	85	77
2	Abdulrahman Al-Ghamdy	95	70	77
3	Ahmad Kanfar	96	88	85
4	Meshaal Al-Matrafy	99	74	70
5	Mohammad Saleh	94	79	78
6	Saeed Al-Zahrany	95	84	79
7	Alaa Al-Thobyani	97	87	82
8	Hani Anbar	97	95	90
9	Mohammad Tobail	99	90	93
10	Majed Al-saeed	94	85	89
11	Fahad Al-Dousari	96	88	82
12	Abdulaah Al-Asmari	98	90	94
13	Murad Asaad	85	69	75
14	Nawaf Al-Harbi	95	75	82
15	Ziad Al-Mteiry	93	73	85
16	Yousef Al-Oteibi	98	89	89

17	Hisham Kayal	98	81	88
18	Turki Al-Ammary	97	70	80
20	Hasan Al-Sulami	95	80	81

Table 1. showed the clear discrepancy between the high school GPA and Qiyas tests results of a random sample of students in the Faculty of Engineering at King Abdulaziz University who sat for the two tests in 2016/2017.

**Chart 1. The results of high school GPA, and Qiyas tests of a random sample of students from the preparation year in the Faculty of Engineering at King Abdulaziz University**

Chart 1. showed the clear discrepancy between the high school GPA and Qiyas tests results of a random sample of students in the Faculty of Engineering at King Abdulaziz University who sat for the two tests before.

4.2. Results of questions 1 & 2

Below are the results of the interviews with educators working in the directorate of education in Jeddah who are in close contact with tests and assessment, principals as leaders in their schools, high school teachers who are in charge of teaching and testing and students who had already passed through the experience of having the school tests and Qiyas tests.

**Table 2. A summary of the interview responses of three male and three female educators in the directorate of education in Jeddah, KSA**

No.	Interview questions	Common answers
1	What are the reasons of discrepancy between the high school grades and Qiyas tests grades in KSA?	-Shortage in high school courses -Students only focus on final exams. - Lack of preparation by schools for Qiyas test -Students are not aware of the nature of Qiyas tests. -School curricula and testing at schools focus on memorization and ignore higher order thinking skills. -There are other reasons that need research to be proved.
2	Do teachers usually cover all the materials/ the syllabuses and include them in the final exam?	-Yes, and teachers usually give mock exams. -Yes, because the directorate of education makes the necessary follow up.
3	Who usually prepares the tests? Is it a committee of all teachers teaching the final year at school? Or each teacher prepares the exam for his own students?	-Each teacher creates his own exam. -Sometimes there is a committee and the teacher doesn't receive a copy of the test before the test is conducted.
4	Is there content validity of the school tests?	-Sometimes, this appears through analyzing tests. -No.
5	Are the final tests conducted properly in terms of monitoring and proctoring?	-Yes, there is usually a schedule for distributing teachers on test rooms. -Yes.
6	What kind of help do students receive while doing the tests at schools?	-There is usually some logistic help that is not related directly to the test. -No help.
7	How are the tests corrected? Do teachers correct their students' exam or is it co- checking?	-Electronic correction -Sometimes there is an subjective question.
8	Are the final exams validated and piloted before administering them?	-Tests are checked by specialized supervisors. -Tests are prepared according to a table of specification under direct supervision. -No.
9	Do schools prepare students well for the Qiyas tests?	-Not all schools do. -Some schools do to some extent. -No.
10	Do you think lenient teachers at school are responsible for low grades in Qiyas tests?	-Yes, it might be, but it is not the main problem. -Yes.
11	In your opinion, how can we limit this discrepancy?	-Raising awareness about the importance of Qiyas tests -Qiyas tests should be reconsidered. -The questions should match the level of students. -Changing the curricula and updating them to suit the new requirements and challenges

Table 2. showed the results of interviewing three male and three female educators in the directorate of education in Jeddah, KSA.

**Table 3. The results of interviewing three male and three female principals of high schools in Jeddah, KSA**

No.	Interview questions	Common answers
1	What are the reasons of discrepancy between the high school grades and Qiyas tests grades in KSA?	-Teachers usually minimize the whole book to a short summary which they include in the final exams and ask students to focus on.
2	Do teachers usually cover all the materials/the syllabuses and include them in the final exam?	Yes.
3	Who usually prepares the tests? Is it a committee of all teachers teaching the final year at school? Or each teacher prepares the exam for his own students?	A committee of teachers.
4	Is there content validity of the school tests?	Yes.
5	Are the final tests conducted properly in terms of monitoring and proctoring?	Yes.
6	What kind of help do students receive while doing the tests at schools?	No answer?!
7	How are the tests corrected? Do teachers correct their students' exams or is it co- checking?	Electronic correction.
8	Are the final exams validated and piloted before administration?	Yes.
9	Do schools prepare students well for the Qiyas Tests?	Yes.
10	Do you think lenient teachers at school are responsible for low grades in Qiyas tests?	Sometimes.
11	In your opinion, how can we limit this discrepancy?	-Doing experimental tests for Qiyas at schools -Qiyas makes the final exam for schools and cancels GAT and Science tests.

Table 3. showed the results of interviewing three male and three female principals in the directorate of education in Jeddah, KSA.

**Table 4. The results of interviewing male and female teachers in high schools in Jeddah, KSA**

No.	Interview questions	Common answers
1	What are the reasons of discrepancy between the high school grades and Qiyas tests grades in KSA?	-Students don't prepare for Qiyas tests. -Schools don't expose students for standardized tests that cover all the material and measure general abilities over the last three years of the high school. - Students rarely cover all the materials at school.
2	Do teachers usually cover all the materials/the syllabuses and include them in the final exam?	Most of the teachers usually cover all the material.
3	Who usually prepares the tests? Is it a committee of all teachers teaching the final year at school? Or each teacher prepares the exam for his own students?	The exam is prepared by a committee of the teachers who teach the same course.
4	Is there content validity of the school tests?	No.
5	Are the final tests conducted properly in terms of monitoring and proctoring?	Yes.
6	What kind of help do students receive while doing the school tests?	No help.
7	How are the tests corrected? Do teachers correct their students' exam or is it co-checking?	Electronic correction.
8	Are the final exams validated and piloted before administration?	Yes.
9	Do schools prepare students well for the Qiyas tests?	Not all schools do.
10	Do you think lenient teachers at school are responsible for low grades in Qiyas tests?	Sometimes, because supervisors tell teachers to be lenient.
11	In your opinion, how can we limit this discrepancy?	Final exams should come from the Ministry of Education and teachers should be strict while conducting the exam.

Table 4. showed the results of interviewing three male and three female teachers in the directorate of education in Jeddah, KSA.

**Table 5. The results of a focus group of fifteen male students who had already done high school tests and Qiyas tests**

No.	Interview questions	Common answers
1	What are the reasons of discrepancy between the high school grades and Qiyas tests grades in KSA?	Qiyas tests are difficult. School doesn't focus on Math. Qiyas tests are unified. School depends on clear syllabus whereas Qiyas is a general aptitude and achievement test. School tests are very easy.

2	Do teachers usually cover all the materials/the syllabuses and include them in the final exam?	Not all teachers cover the entire course plan. No, they don't. No, they don't have time. Yes, they cover all syllabus. Some teachers delete parts from the syllabus. They cover the book but don't include it in the test.
3	Who usually prepares the tests? Is it a committee of all teachers teaching the final year at school? Or each teacher prepares the exam for his own students?	A committee of teachers. It depends on the subject. Each teacher writes his own test.
4	Is there content validity of the school tests?	We don't know what content validity means.
5	Are the final tests conducted properly in terms of monitoring and proctoring?	Yes. No. I don't know. Some teachers are very lenient while conducting the test. Some teachers are careless about proctoring.
6	What kind of help do students receive while doing the school tests?	Paraphrasing questions to help students understand them. No help. Explaining some questions. Some schools give the test questions to students in advance. Some teachers help students in answering questions. Reading the questions for students.
7	How are the tests corrected? Do teachers correct their students' exam or is it co-checking?	Electronic correction. It depends on the test. Sometimes co-checking.
8	Are the final exams validated and piloted before administration?	We don't know. No.
9	Do schools prepare students well for the Qiyas tests?	Not all, some schools do. Individual efforts. Some schools train students on Qiyas.
10	Do you think lenient teachers at school are responsible for low grades in Qiyas tests?	Yes, to some extent. Sure, many teachers don't have enough qualification or even self-development. Yes, when the teacher is the only source for information.
11	In your opinion, how can we limit this discrepancy?	Preparation courses for Qiyas tests. I don't know. Unifying tests. Teacher continuous evaluation. Strict proctoring. Including all the material. Giving schools mock tests. The Ministry sends proctors to control the exams at schools. Covering all the syllabus. The test should cover the whole syllabus.

Table 5. showed the results of interviewing three male and three female students in the directorate of education in Jeddah, KSA.

## V. Discussion

It is pretty clear from table (1) above that there is a big difference between high school GPA and Qiyas tests results in favor of the high school GPA. The GPA is a product of each school as a separate entity, prepared, monitored, conducted and corrected according to each school's criteria. How much material the exam covered and how the exam covered that material don't matter because the local school exam can cope with all conditions. Unlike the school exam, Qiyas tests are prepared for the whole kingdom. They are prepared, monitored, conducted and corrected away from schools. These tests don't take into consideration the particular cases of each school like an absent teacher, an incomplete syllabus or a lazy teacher who minimized the whole book to few pages. Because the results of Qiyas tests are noticeably less than the high school GPA and as a result negatively affect students final GPA and their acceptance at higher education institutions, they become a source of disappointment for students and their families. This research is a try to solve this problem and investigate the reasons behind the discrepancy between school GPA and Qiyas results and to find out how to minimize this discrepancy to the lowest point.

The people interviewed are those in direct contact with the schools and the teaching/learning process. They are educators in the directorate of education in Jeddah, principals as leaders of schools, teachers who are in charge of preparing the final exams and students who passed through the experience of having the three types of exams and suffered from the discrepancy between the GPA and Qiyas results. Their answers to question one about the reasons of discrepancy vary according to their job sensitivity. Educators blamed schools for not preparing students for Qiyas tests and only exposing them to tests based on memorization and limiting the tests

to lower order thinking skills, leaving the door open to other reasons. “*There are other reasons that need research to be proved*” Al-Ghamdi, 15<sup>th</sup>, April 2018. Principals blamed teachers for not covering the material and for minimizing books to short summaries to be included in the final tests. Teachers blamed students for not being serious enough to deal with Qiyas tests. Finally, students blamed everybody for not preparing them for Qiyas tests which are very challenging to them and for only being exposed to school tests that are very easy. When asked about the coverage of the materials, educators, principals and teachers confirmed that all the materials were covered because there was continuous follow-up done by educators and principals. Students said that the materials are rarely covered, and many challenging units are excluded especially the few last units because of time limits and lack of planning. “*They rarely cover the syllabus and when they did, they exclude many units in the final exams.*” Fahad Al-Harby, 21<sup>st</sup>, March 2018.

Preparing the final tests according to content validity, table of specifications, reliability and piloting was almost a vague issue for most of the interviewees. Answers varied between a bare “Yes” without any further explanation or “I don’t know.” to avoid any other questions they can’t answer. This means that tests at schools are prepared in a very traditional way especially MCQ questions which need very high skills to make choices distracting and difficult for answering.

Questions five, six and seven are about the way exams are monitored at high schools. Educators, principals and teachers said that exams are done perfectly according to the rules and proctors help -if needed- is only limited to logistic help that is not directly related to the exams themselves. They also said that correction is done electronically except for two subjective questions corrected by teachers. Students’ answers were unexpectedly contradicting to educators, principals and teachers’ answers. They said that some teachers are lenient and give unlimited help to students. They read and explain the questions, they close eyes on cheating and in rare cases they give clues to their students in advance about the exams. The concept “test bank” is very common in KSA both at schools and universities.

When asked whether schools prepare students for Qiyas tests or not, educators, teachers and students said that only some schools do and this depends on individual attitudes among teachers. They consider it a source of pride when their students GPA and Qiyas tests results are relatively similar. All interviewees agreed unanimously that lenient teachers through their irresponsible practices are the main reason for the discrepancy between GPA and Qiyas results. When they don’t train their students on Qiyas tests, when they minimize a whole book into few pages to be included in the final exam, when they don’t give their students enough practice on challenging questions especially in Math and physics and most tragically when they give them very easy exams that don’t go through the filters of validity, reliability and piloting, they are certainly contributing to this discrepancy.

Their answers to the last question “How can we limit the discrepancy?” were the most detailed. Educators said that awareness about the importance of Qiyas tests should be raised among principals, teachers and students. They added that the nature of Qiyas tests should be reconsidered in terms of difficulty of questions to suit the level of students and school curricula should be updated to match the new challenges. Principals said that schools should give training and mock tests for Qiyas tests and they suggested that Qiyas tests can be done at schools under external management. Teachers said that the final exams at schools should come from the Ministry of Education and teachers should be stricter in monitoring and proctoring these exams. Students said that they should be prepared very well at schools for Qiyas tests through giving training and mock tests, teachers should include all the materials in the school final tests and these tests should be run under the direct management of the Ministry of Education.

## **VI. Conclusion and recommendation**

The GPA of the Saudi high schools proved to be misleading for students both locally and internationally. It doesn’t show any predictive validity at higher education institutions. This dilemma was treated by introducing Qiyas tests which are prepared and conducted away from schools. What is disappointing to students and their parents is that there is a clear discrepancy between school GPA and Qiyas tests results. Most students get almost full marks at schools and feel dramatically surprised by the noticeable drop at Qiyas tests performance. The result is a dragged down average that deprives them of the colleges they are dreaming of. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education should reconsider the way high school final exams are monitored in terms of preparation, implementation and correction. The school curricula and the teaching strategies should be updated to cope with the new challenges. Although the Qiyas tests assume high credibility locally and internationally, it should continue to be updated and standardized to have more predictive validity.

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#### Appendix (1)

- 1- What are the reasons of discrepancy between the high school grades and Qiyas tests grades in KSA?
- 2- Do teachers usually cover all the materials/the syllabuses and include them in the final exam?
- 3- Who usually prepares the tests? Is it a committee of all teachers teaching the final year at school? Or each teacher prepares the exam for his own students?
- 4- Is there content validity of the school tests?
- 5- Are the final tests conducted properly in terms of monitoring and proctoring?
- 6- What kind of help do students receive while doing the school tests?
- 7- How are the tests corrected? Do teachers correct their students' exam or is it co-checking?
- 8- Are the final exams validated and piloted before administration?
- 9- Do schools prepare students well for Qiyas tests?
- 10- Do you think lenient teachers at schools are responsible for low grades in Qiyas tests?
- 11- In your opinion, how can we limit this discrepancy?

Salameh Saleem Mahmoud1. "The Discrepancy between High School GPA and Qiyas Results among Saudi High School Students." IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME) , vol. 8, no. 6, 2018, pp. 34-41.