

Byung-Chul Han on the De-Ritualization of Academic Lifeworld in the Age of Student-Centered Learning

Mark Earvin M. Cervantes¹

Far Eastern University – Manila, Philippines

ARTICLE HISTORY

Date Submitted: September 3, 2025 | *Date Accepted:* November 4, 2025 | *Date Published:* December 30, 2025

ABSTRACT

The overarching objective of this study is to examine how student-centered learning (SCL) functions as a vehicle for advancing neoliberal agendas in Philippine higher education. Drawing from Byung-Chul Han's critique of neoliberal achievement society, the study argues that universities are undergoing a process of de-ritualization, where communal academic practices are displaced by individualized, performance-oriented structures. Through a qualitative critical-philosophical analysis of higher education discourse and policy, this study reveals how the rhetoric of autonomy and personalization, which SCL promotes, aligns education with market logics. Student-centered learning is designed to empower learners; however, this study argues that its neoliberal appropriation has led students to being reduced as self-optimizing and performative agents governed by hyper-individualistic views compelled by neoliberal notion of freedom. This shift transforms education into a site of consumption rather than formation as HEIs prioritize employability over collective reflection and meaning, while paradoxically claiming that today's schooling focuses on students' holistic growth. This study concludes by advocating for the reintegration of academic rituals that nurture community, restore depth, and reaffirm the university's transformative purpose.

Keywords: Byung-Chul Han, critical pedagogy, neoliberalism, higher education, Philippine education

I. INTRODUCTION

In his *magnum opus* *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire exposed the inherent political nature of education. He argued that teaching is never neutral but always serves either to domesticate or to liberate students. The goals of education are primarily shaped according to the heartbeat of its society (Roberts, 2016). The overall principles of education that inform both the contents and methodologies applied across various academic institutions reflect the communal spirit of a society. The direction of schools reflects their society's core values, aspirations, and cultural identity. Thus, education is a crucial process and a social mechanism through which societies instill foundational beliefs, reinforce cultural norms, and set visions for future generations (Thompson, 2004).

doi: 10.5281/zenodo.18081550

¹Corresponding Author: mecervantes@feu.edu.ph

What a society deems worthy of learning reveals much about its collective spirit. This purview is generally expressed in two panoramas.

The first view is a communitarian view of education, which conveys that education emphasizes communal well-being and social solidarity. This view prioritizes cooperative learning, community service, and social responsibility. It is manifested in pedagogies that promote group activities, shared projects, and curricula centered on social reconstruction (Noddings, 2005). For instance, team-based learning and interdisciplinary projects embed the ideals of social harmony and interconnectedness into the educational experience (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Students are primarily trained to work collaboratively and understand how to tolerate alternative perspectives. Societies that follow this view believe that students must learn to adapt to different situations and accommodate different views, which are vital for the development of society. Hence, education bridges individual growth and social unity, aligning personal goals with collective ideals (Barton & Levstik, 2004).

Conversely, the second view focuses on individual success. This educational paradigm prioritizes individual success, personal economic productivity, and competitive achievement. It structures educational policies to emphasize personal accomplishment and enhancement of quantifiable results (Spring, 2016). In such a panorama, methodologies like standardized testing, performance metrics, and goal-oriented learning prevail. These systems promote individual excellence and encourage students to develop resilience, self-motivation, and adaptability (Lareau, 2011). Scholars have found that this view fits well with the neoliberal agendas (Giroux, 2014). In this scheme, education becomes a pathway for producing high-achieving individuals who are self-reliant, competitive, and prepared to navigate a meritocratic landscape. For instance, the focus on measurable productivity reflects a societal emphasis on results, personal optimization, and economic gain. It shapes students to value these same priorities in their personal and professional lives (Ball, 2012). Through these differing approaches, educational systems do more than teach academic subjects. They form students into specific cultural, economic, and ideological frameworks. Thus, the guiding principles of education mirror and perpetuate societal ideals, reinforcing what society considers significant (Apple, 2004). They also indicate societal trajectory and priorities, as they reveal what a society envisions for its future.

Literature Review

A. *The Shift to Student-Centered Learning*

In the Philippine setting, the *Geist* of higher education is tautly debated. From the rightist perspective, Philippine higher education is designed to provide holistic education through balancing the communitarian and individualist views of education. Learning institutions incorporate a mix of traditional, experience-based, and character-building activities into their programs to provide students with a more comprehensive understanding of what their chosen industries offer. This multi-faceted approach to learning design and curriculum allows students to make better career decisions (Hipolito et al., 2023). Importantly, the push for holistic development of learners is vividly seen in

how the Commission for Higher Education drives higher education institutions to shift the teaching orientation from teacher-centered to a student-centered one. In the Handbook on Typology, Outcomes-Based Education, and Institutional Sustainability Assessment, the CHED states: “In this paradigm shift, teachers are not just experts giving inputs but facilitators of learning. They must provide ways to allow students to play their part in constructing knowledge through experience, discussions, reflections, and other processes that promote analytical and critical thinking. Because the focus is now on the student’s attainment of competencies, there is a need to observe and/or measure the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that have been achieved.”

Moreover, in different policies, standards, and guidelines (PSG) for all degree programs, the CHED highlights the appropriateness of a student-centered/outcomes-based approach as found in all PSGs’ general provisions (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2017, 2020, 2022). From the traditional vertical relationship between the teacher and the student, universities reshape their educational approach by reorienting this teacher-student engagement to a horizontal direction (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2020). This approach makes students the main agents in the learning process, while instructors provide guideposts for the overall learning directions. Hence, student-centered learning is an empowering pedagogy focusing on active learning, personal relevance, and autonomy. Student-centered learning (SCL) promotes this shift from passive reception of information to active engagement and takes responsibility for their learning processes (Weimer, 2013). Ideally, this approach would enhance students’ critical thinking skills and foster a deeper understanding of the subject matter by positioning students as active participants rather than passive recipients. Further, Hattie and Donoghue (2016) suggested that students develop stronger cognitive skills and are more motivated to learn when they engage in activities requiring self-regulation and problem-solving. SCL emphasizes the importance of relevance and personalization, enabling students to see the value of their education in real-world contexts. Studies indicate that when students perceive learning as relevant to their lives and future goals, they are more likely to be engaged and develop a lasting interest in the material (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Furthermore, several scholarly works argued for the effectiveness of student-centered learning in the actual teaching and learning process because of its empowering features. For instance, Armbruster et al. (2009) redesigned an introductory biology course to implement active learning and student-centered pedagogies and compared it to a traditional teacher-centered version. They conducted a quasi-experimental study over three years, analyzing final exam performance and student attitude surveys. Their findings demonstrate that student-centered pedagogy not only improves academic outcomes but also positively shapes students’ attitudes toward learning. This work is complemented by how SCL facilitates the inculcation of 21st-century skills to students.

Hadiyanto (2024) investigated the implementation of student-centered learning (SCL) in TEFL courses to assess its impact on students’ 21st-century skills. Using a mixed-methods design, 220 students completed questionnaires on skills performance, and ten course designs were analyzed qualitatively for SCL integration. Their results indicate that

SCL effectively develops students' communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and IT literacy skills, emphasizing the critical role of pedagogical design in fostering modern competencies. In addition, Kerimbayev et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review of 43 studies published from 2012 to 2023 to examine how modern technologies support student-centered learning in distance education. They applied thematic analysis to identify key benefits such as enhanced engagement, autonomy, and flexibility, as well as challenges, including access to resources and teacher training. Grounded in empirical literature, their study shows that technology-mediated student-centered approaches can significantly enhance learning outcomes while highlighting structural constraints in implementation.

The above-mentioned literature points out how autonomy and independence play in student-centered learning. Autonomy is the critical element of SCL, as it offers students choices in how they approach learning tasks, encouraging independence and accountability (Zimmerman, 2002). CHED recognizes the need for the flexibility offered by student-centered learning due to the diversity of Filipino learners, both in capabilities and socio-economic background. In CMO No. 6, s. 2022, the Commission underscores the importance of sustaining flexible learning as "the most responsive and inclusive approach to ensure the continuity of accessible, quality tertiary education." It reiterates that higher education institutions must "adopt learning systems that are outcomes-based, learner-centered, and adaptive to the varied contexts of students." Through this directive, CHED positions student-centered learning not merely as a pedagogical choice but as a policy framework that promotes equity, inclusivity, and resilience in higher education. This move affirms the shift from traditional instruction toward modes of teaching that empower students as active participants in constructing knowledge, responsive to their personal, technological, and social realities (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2022). In this way, SCL creates a supportive environment where students are encouraged to learn and are empowered to contribute actively to their educational experience. As a result, SCL fosters an empowered mindset in students, equipping them with the skills to navigate complex tasks and take initiative in future learning endeavors (Weimer, 2013).

B. Neoliberalization of HEIs in the Philippines

However, from the leftists' account, universities and academic institutions in the Philippines have increasingly become instrumentalized by neoliberal ideology. According to Giroux (2014, p. 15), under neoliberalism, "the culture of education is increasingly subordinated to the logic of the market." Likewise, "in this orientation, competition, profit, and privatization are given higher emphasis while the promotion of democratic values, social responsibility, and critical thought are often marginalized" (Giroux, 2014, p. 15). It generally transforms HEIs into learning spaces that prioritize profit, productivity, and measurable outcomes. These measurable outcomes have become the basis for the formulation of the concept of holistic development. In the Philippine setting, Gerry Lanuza (2022) argued that neoliberalism in education has resulted in "commodification" and "commercialization" processes. It transforms the view of education as a private investment rather than a public good. Under this framework,

students are considered consumers, and academic programs become products. This reality leads HEIs to prioritize courses and programs that generate profit and cater to market demands. Supporting this view, Pascua (2022) pointed out that Philippine HEIs are increasingly shaped by “neoliberal standards of education rather than genuine academic progress.”

This point of view is seen in the dominance of private institutions, the deregulation of educational governance, and the growing orientation toward industry partnerships (p. 42). He argues that this condition has turned college students into “future commodities of the neoliberal state” (p. 43), revealing the extent to which universities equate the value of academic life to market logic. Similarly, San Juan (2016) argued that neoliberalism has subjected universities to “privatization, corporatization, and the technicalization of learning” (p. 81). It transforms educational institutions into spaces where knowledge production is subordinated to the demands of capital accumulation and labor-force production. Supporting these theoretical claims, Sannadan and Lang-ay (2021) conducted a qualitative meta-analysis of empirical studies examining Philippine higher education institutions, drawing on interview-based and case study evidence from faculty and students. Their analysis reveals that neoliberal restructuring manifests through performativity, audit culture, and managerial accountability systems that reshape teaching and learning practices. Grounded in qualitative data, their argument demonstrates how neoliberal rationalities are materially experienced within classrooms and institutional governance.

Further, Mula-Falcón and Caballero (2022) undertook a systematic qualitative review of 38 peer-reviewed articles published from 2010 to 2020 to examine how neoliberal reforms in higher education are impacting academics. They applied thematic analysis (via NVivo 12) to identify three major themes: new neoliberal action strategies among academics; shifting professional identities; and work, health, and social consequences of neoliberalization. Grounded entirely in empirical qualitative studies, their argument demonstrates that neoliberalism is materially reshaping academics’ identities, practices, and well-being across diverse international contexts. This catena of scholarly works argues that the commodified model of higher education privileges employability and profitability over critical thought and social transformation. This degenerative subjugation of education under the clutches of neoliberalism effectively reconstitutes universities as business enterprises that directly complement both the values and needs of the globalized market.

Nevertheless, the unprecedented developments of technology have caused this neoliberal turn in education. Schwab (2016) viewed this transformation optimistically. He viewed the alignment of education with technological and economic change as a pathway to empowerment and progress. He asserted that “The capacity to adapt will be the most critical skill in the future labor market” (p. 47) and that “education systems must align with the skills required in the new economy” (p. 68). For Schwab (2016), the integration of market-oriented values into education is not commodification but an opportunity to enhance human potential and ensure relevance in an innovation-driven world. Similarly, Harari (2018) expressed a positive outlook on the transformation of education in the age

of automation and artificial intelligence. He emphasized adaptability as the key to human survival in rapidly changing societies. He contended that “to keep up with the world of 2050, you will need not merely to invent new ideas and products—you will above all need to reinvent yourself again and again” (p. 266). In this sense, both Schwab’s and Harari’s visions converged on an education system that internalizes market-driven ideals of adaptability and self-optimization as markers of success.

This neoliberal shift has altered the role of educators and students as they are pushed toward outcome-based performance (Giroux, 2020). As mentioned above, outcomes-based education and student-centered learning are interwoven, and with the unchecked inclination of the OBE system toward the market logic, the latter’s humanistic value is threatened. Teaching is increasingly evaluated based on student satisfaction and quantifiable results, while students are often guided toward programs with high employability metrics rather than intellectual curiosity or civic engagement (Giroux, 2014). Following Giroux and Freire’s perspectives, Lanuza (2022) further argued that this instrumentalization reduces education to a transactional relationship. Learning is geared toward producing skilled laborers rather than critical, socially aware citizens. Neoliberal reforms have introduced extensive accountability systems, such as standardized testing and ranking systems (Giroux, 2001). This market logic promotes competition among HEIs on a global scale (Ball, 2012). Such measures compel universities to adopt corporate management practices with emphasis on efficiency and cost-cutting over educational quality. This leads to an erosion of academic freedom and a reduction in critical discourse within universities as they become increasingly focused on satisfying the demands of the market. HEIs are transformed into “factories” that produce workforce-ready graduates and sideline the university’s role as a space for critical thought, intellectual exploration, and social transformation (Giroux, 2014).

Nevertheless, despite the ongoing scholarly criticisms against the neoliberalization of universities in the country, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding the appropriation of student-centered learning (SCL) as a mechanism that reinforces neoliberal agendas within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). While many scholars have addressed the broader implications of neoliberal educational policies, an examination of how SCL can paradoxically align with and support neoliberal ideologies remains to be seen. This oversight is significant because SCL focuses on individual agency and personalized learning experiences, which can be co-opted to prioritize efficiency and consumer satisfaction over deeper educational engagement and communal learning. By not adequately elucidating the neoliberal appropriation of SCL in this context, researchers may inadvertently overlook its role in perpetuating the neoliberal framework that shapes educational policies and practices. As such, this study seeks to fill this gap by investigating how adopting SCL can serve as a tool for advancing neoliberal interests in HEIs while undermining the humanistic dimension of education that promotes critical thinking, social responsibility, and collaborative learning. This analysis aims to foster a more nuanced understanding of the implications of SCL within the neoliberal landscape of higher education.

This study, then, seeks to address the question: How does the appropriation of student-centered learning (SCL) in Philippine higher education reflect and reinforce the neoliberalization of universities? It aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the market-driven transformation of education by critically examining student-centered learning, a pedagogy designed to empower learners, which has been misappropriated in neoliberalizing higher education institutions. Specifically, it examines how neoliberal rationalities reshape academic rituals, fragment communal learning, and flatten the temporal and formative dimensions of the learning process, as interpreted through Byung-Chul Han's critique of the achievement society. Through Han's framework, this study situates the neoliberal appropriation of SCL within the broader transformation of education from a communal practice into a performative system of self-optimization.

II. METHODS

This paper uses a critical philosophical analysis grounded in Byung-Chul Han's critique from his seminal works, such as *Disappearance of Rituals*, *Digital Swarm*, *Burn Society*, and *Transparent Society*, to examine how SCL practices have been appropriated for neoliberal goals. First, this study seeks to develop a theoretical framework grounded in Byung-Chul Han's important writings. After forming the framework, this study critically interprets how academic rituals are increasingly sidelined and instrumentalized by market-driven priorities. Since this study focuses on philosophical and political nuances of student-centered learning, which falls under qualitative research, a quantified set of data is not part of the investigation. To form the argument and systematically advance the conceptual argument of this work, several databases were utilized to gather available studies on the philosophical ramifications of student centered learning including journal articles, and canonical books written by other philosophers with complementary ideas. Since this work focuses on the general appropriation of student-centered learning in HEIs in the Philippines, this study includes relevant Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memoranda.

This study employs Han's thought and views significant in this context because, as an Asian philosopher writing within and against Western philosophical traditions, he embodies a critical standpoint that bridges East Asian communitarian sensibilities and Western critiques of modernity. His reflections on digital culture, performativity, and neoliberal subjectivity reveal how contemporary market values risk erasing the established social rituals including academic traditions that foster humanistic values. By situating Han's philosophy within the Philippine educational landscape, this study not only illuminates the cultural and philosophical implications of SCL but also affirms the relevance of Asian critical thought in reimagining education beyond neoliberal imperatives. Other relevant ideas coming from other thinkers are intentionally incorporated to strengthen the claims of this study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a critical interpretation of how a neoliberal-appropriated student-centered learning (SCL) has contributed to the de-ritualization of academic life.

Drawing on Byung-Chul Han's critique of the contemporary achievement society, it inquires how communal academic practices are displaced by individualized, performance-driven structures. The discussion unfolds across three dimensions. This section begins with the theoretical discussion of Han's idea ritual and community. The two following sections reveal how individualism and fragmentation and technologization and commodification disintegrate the academic life world into personalized and consumable avenue to acquire market relevant competencies.

A. Academic Rituals and Communal Learning

In general, rituals create a sense of community since they enable people to have shared experiences with other people. Rituals as symbolic practices bring people together since, etymologically, symbol (Gk. *symbollein*) means "to bring together." Rituals are derived primarily from religious practices since the word "religion," from the Latin "religare," means "to bind, tie, or fasten together." A solitary individual cannot establish a "religion" or form alliances with others, which makes the performance of rituals impossible. Rituals create a bodily knowledge and memory, an embodied identity, and a bodily connection. A ritual community is a communal body, and there is a bodily dimension inherent to the community.

Byung-Chul Han (2020) lamented the erosion of symbolic practices that once gave coherence, depth, and continuity to human life. He argued that rituals are not mere formalities but formative structures that anchor communal identity, shape temporality, and provide ontological stability. They create a "shared world" through repetition, symbolism, and embodied participation. Further, rituals are anything that stabilizes life and is characterized by repetition (Han, 2020). Repetition, in turn, stabilizes and deepens attention. Lingering presupposes that things endure. This lingering is possible only through repetition. Since the pacing of life in the present society is characterized by rapidity, it is, in turn, unstable. Without rituals, life becomes a mere passage through time and not habituation in time (Han, 2020).

This resonates with John Dewey's (1916/2004) emphasis on education as a shared experience. Dewey (1938) argued that education should impart knowledge and cultivate democratic habits through communal engagement since teaching and learning are necessary "for the continued existence of a society." From this vantage point, rituals in academic life are not limited to ceremonial occasions such as graduations or convocations. Everyday practices, including classroom discussions, mentorship, and collaborative projects, also function as rituals that counteract the alienation characteristic of modern educational systems. This de-ritualization of the academic life is manifested in the commodification of education wherein classrooms become a transactional space, and learning is economically oriented. Han (2020) posited that without rituals, "there is no community" (p.4). This absence of community leads to an atomized existence where students and educators are isolated from one another and from education's deeper cultural and social purposes.

While Han underscores the erosion of communal forms under neoliberal conditions, Alasdair MacIntyre (2007), in *After Virtue*, offers a complementary

philosophical perspective by conceiving education as a practice rooted in enduring traditions and shared moral frameworks. He argued that education is an avenue where rituals serve as necessary vessels for transmitting not only technical competence but also the virtues and cultural values that sustain a community. Rituals in academic life, whether in the form of classroom routines, communal gatherings, or ceremonial practices, are not superficial acts but rather integral moments where the ethical substance of education is embodied. In this way, education becomes more than the acquisition of technical skills. It is a moral and cultural initiation into a tradition that shapes character and identity (Griffiths & Prozesky, 2020). Recent scholarship affirms this account. Hart (2022) emphasized that rituals within schools sustain the internal goods of educational practices such as trust, curiosity, and communal responsibility. For Hart (2022), MacIntyre's (2007) framework reveals how students' biographical narratives are anchored within traditions, making rituals indispensable for cultivating character and transmitting virtues.

Similarly, Manthalu and Waghid, (2019) reconceptualized teaching as a transformative practice by situating MacIntyre's thought within the South African educational context. Here, rituals are shown to inculcate democratic ideals by forging spaces where learners and teachers alike participate in moral transformation rooted in communal traditions. This reinforces the idea that rituals are not merely repetitive gestures but practices that make virtue visible within particular historical and cultural contexts. By rooting education in traditions enacted through ritual, communities preserve the internal goods of practice against external threats, ensuring that education remains a site for the cultivation of virtues rather than mere market-driven outcomes (Hart, 2022). MacIntyre's perspective complements Han's critique by underscoring how the erosion of rituals impoverishes academic life's moral and intellectual fabric. Educational institutions, in this sense, confuse certification with knowledge. The diploma becomes a "ticket" to marketability rather than a mark of intellectual or ethical formation and guarantee of performativity (Sannadad & Lang-ay, 2020).

Han (2020) says that rituals also come in the form of manners. Hence, ritual practices undoubtedly build a community in the sense that they "ensure that we treat not only other people but also things in beautiful ways." Modern universities often prioritize performance and efficiency, which Han (2020) criticized as hallmarks of the "achievement society." In this environment, students are treated as consumers and professors as service providers. This phenomenon erodes the shared ritualistic experiences that bind academic communities. This "ritual poverty," as Han described it, leads to burnout and a loss of purpose among both students and educators. Eastern traditions also highlight the significance of rituals in education. Confucianism, for example, places strong emphasis on rituals (*li*) as a means of cultivating personal virtue and social harmony. Confucius argued that rituals create a framework for individuals to fulfill their roles within a community, promoting respect and a sense of belonging. The Confucian ideal of *li* resonates with Han's (2020) call to revive rituals in academic settings, suggesting that structured practices can restore meaning and connection in education.

B. Individualism and Fragmentation of Learning

Yet, despite these traditions underscoring the communal and ritual dimensions of learning, contemporary appropriation of student-centered learning (SCL) as re-defined by market forces tend to privilege individual autonomy over collective formation. This shift marks a departure from education as a shared cultural practice toward a more fragmented and self-referential pursuit. Ideally, Student-Centered Learning (SCL) functions as an emancipatory pedagogy that nurtures students' agency, autonomy, and critical engagement with knowledge (Freire, 2000; Dewey, 1938). This approach draws directly from progressive educational traditions, including Freire's dialogical pedagogy, which positions learners as co-creators of knowledge and emphasizes critical consciousness and social transformation (Freire, 2000), and Dewey's experiential education, which frames learning as active, contextual, and socially mediated (Dewey, 1938; Biesta, 2010). Contemporary scholarship highlights that integrating these perspectives within SCL aligns with constructivist learning theory: learners construct understanding collaboratively through reflection, experience, and dialogue, fostering both intellectual growth and socio-emotional development (Biesta, 2010; McLaren, 2015).

However, when SCL is embedded in a neoliberal framework, its ideals are subtly transformed. Byung-Chul Han's critique of modern society provides a compelling lens to examine the paradox of individualism and false pretensions of freedom that could be appropriated to SCL. While SCL aims to empower individuals by catering to their unique needs, interests, and learning styles, Han's critical arguments could highlight how this same approach can be misappropriated and subvert the very logic behind the promotion of student-centered learning. This subversion paradoxically reinforces isolation and exacerbate hyper-individualism pressures when embedded within a neoliberal framework. What begins as a humanistic pedagogy of empowerment becomes a machinery of self-optimization and hyper-individualism. Traditional philosophies of education, whether Platonic, Confucian, or humanist, conceive of education as formation. Education is concerned with the gradual shaping of subjectivity through guided engagement in language, tradition, and thought. In contrast, neoliberal education reduces learning to measurable outputs. The Philippines' adoption of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) exemplifies this logic. Learning is no longer teleologically oriented toward the good, the true, the meaningful, but toward "competencies," "skills," and "employability."

This shift from formative education to performative learning reflects the emergence of a new kind of subjectivity shaped by neoliberal rationality. Han (2015) identifies this figure as the "achievement-subject" in an "achievement-society." It is a contemporary formulation of the self that exploits itself under the illusion of freedom. Unlike Foucault's obedience-subject of disciplinary society, the achievement-subject internalizes market logic, becoming an entrepreneur, laborer, or manager of the self (Han, 2015). Following this framework, schooling becomes a site of neoliberal biopolitics: students are governed not by coercion but by metrics, goals, and internalized performance anxieties. Students turn themselves into a commodity with market value

and their goal is to increase such market value by constantly working on their individual selves (Sannadan & Lang-ay, 2020). Han's analysis of the achievement-subject typically focuses on Western, late-capitalist contexts.

However, in the Philippine context, neoliberal subjectivity is compounded by postcolonial precarity. Filipino students are burdened not only by performance metrics but also by economic survival, familial expectations, and infrastructural collapse. Yet even within this precarity, the logic of self-exploitation prevails. Scholarship applications, social media self-branding, and student leadership positions become avenues of entrepreneurial self-construction. Failure is no longer attributed to systemic dysfunction but internalized as personal insufficiency.

Within this neoliberal context, student-centered learning (SCL) becomes reinterpreted through market rationalities that emphasize performance, flexibility, and self-management. SCL originally seeks to empower learners through agency and participation; however, its appropriation under neoliberal conditions transforms it into a mechanism that reinforces self-optimization and performance subjectivity. Consequently, neoliberal interpretations of student-centered learning transform its emancipatory ideals of agency and self-determination into mechanisms of hyper-individualization and achievement pressure. This transformation fractures the learning community and reinforces the isolation Han associates with the achievement society. Under the guise of freedom and independence, students become isolated agents, expected to navigate learning paths tailored specifically to them. They traverse this personalized learning experience with often digitalized and fragmented institutional support.

This structure fosters what Han (2015) called the "exhaustion of the self." Students are pushed into endless cycles of self-optimization to meet the demands of an increasingly competitive academic and professional landscape. If individuals become increasingly inward-focused and self-referential, they also tend to adopt a heightened skepticism toward shared practices that traditionally bind communities together. Symbolic acts that affirm belonging and continuity often become objects of suspicion or outright dismissal. This antagonism shows a broader disintegration of the communal fabric in favor of hyper-individualized modes of existence, which SCL unintentionally produced.

The disintegration of communal bonds further extends to the temporal dimension of human experience. For Han, the disappearance of rituals produces a temporal flattening in which moments cease to be meaningfully differentiated or anchored in shared rhythms. In the absence of ritualized markers, time collapses into an undifferentiated flow; life becomes a continuous present devoid of moments of rupture, reflection, or renewal. In a neoliberal-modified student-centered learning, students are so focused on meeting school requirements to the point that even school activities which celebrate human flourishing were simply complied for added merits. Each moment, each semester, simply blurs into the next without producing a significant impact on the lives of the students. Additionally, SCL reflects what Han described as the commodification of human experience under neoliberalism. Education is reframed as a marketable product tailored to consumer preferences by emphasizing individual learning pathways.

Students are positioned as customers, expected to “consume” educational content that aligns with their perceived needs. This transactional approach undermines education's relational and transformative aspects, reducing it to a service rather than a communal intellectual and moral growth process.

Such transactional logic reshapes the temporal and cognitive texture of learning itself. Han warns that genuine knowledge cannot be “injected” instantaneously into the mind through platforms like TikTok or YouTube. Just as rituals provide the temporal and symbolic architecture that binds discrete moments into a coherent life-narrative, genuine understanding demands more than the passive reception of isolated snippets. When one scrolls through a smartphone, one encounters a ceaseless cascade of new items, social-media updates, and short-form videos, each presented in a decontextualized, atomized manner. Unlike rituals, which embed events within a shared narrative and confer lasting significance, this digital deluge offers no integrative framework. The fragmentation of learning undermines the capacity to construct an enduring epistemic narrative as context or continuity are continuously being undermined. This results to acquisition of knowledge that is superficial. As seen through Han’s lens, the paradox of individualism in neoliberal toning of SCL reveals that what appears to be a liberating educational model often entangles students in the structures it seeks to dismantle. Han (2020) suggested that a solution lies in reclaiming communal practices and shared rituals that counteract the isolating effects of hyper-individualism. For education, this means integrating collective activities and spaces for dialogue that emphasize shared meaning and mutual support. Only by balancing individual agency with a sense of community can student-centered learning fulfill its promise without succumbing to the pitfalls of neoliberal individualism.

On the other hand, not all forms of collectivity resist neoliberal tendencies. Collaboration, though seemingly a communal practice within this neoliberal student-centered learning (SCL), often reproduces the very individualism it seeks to overcome. In the contexts of Han’s (2015) critique of the achievement society, collaborative work in SCL becomes egotistical, as students could approach group projects to advance their academic success rather than contributing to a shared intellectual experience. This instrumentalization of collaboration is evident in how group work is often designed within this kind of framework. While students may engage in dialogue and division of labor, these interactions are frequently driven by a desire to maximize personal benefits rather than cultivate collective understanding. Han (2020) argued that such practices destroys the communal bonds that traditional rituals create and transforms what could be meaningful collaborative experiences into transactional exchanges.

The ritualistic dimensions of academic collaboration, such as shared reflection, mutual support, and the co-creation of knowledge, are replaced by the pragmatic concerns of meeting deadlines and achieving individual performance metrics. Additionally, the neoliberal ethos embedded in SCL reinforces this egotistical approach to collaboration. As Lanuza (2022) noted, the commodification of education transforms students into consumers and their academic outputs into marketable commodities. In this context, group work becomes a means to an end, where students focus on leveraging the

collective effort for personal, academic, and professional advancement. Moreover, it perpetuates a cycle of self-interest masked as teamwork which aligns with Han's (2020) observation that the achievement society reduces communal rituals to instrumentalized practices.

Educators must rethink how collaboration is structured within SCL to address this paradox. Rather than centering assessments on individual contributions, they should emphasize shared outcomes and processes, encouraging students to view group work as an opportunity for genuine communal engagement. Rituals such as reflective dialogues, communal celebrations of achievements, and iterative feedback sessions can reintegrate collaboration's relational and ritualistic dimensions. By reclaiming these practices, SCL can only move beyond its egotistical tendencies and realize its potential as a framework for transformative, collective learning experiences.

Yet the question remains: can SCL truly sustain communal learning within a system that prizes flexibility above all else? Han's critique of neoliberal individualism suggests otherwise, showing how personalization and self-pacing fracture the shared temporality that rituals once secured. Under SCL, students are encouraged to pursue self-paced learning paths, tailor their schedules, and engage with content that aligns with their interests and goals. However, this emphasis on individualized learning trajectories often leads to fragmented academic journeys. Hence, the reason why most students do not possess deep knowledge of their field is that they do not allow for contemplation. They speed read through lessons for the sake of passing the course without retaining much of the information. Learning has also become ephemeral, with students being unable to connect one lesson with another, the same with their inability to connect the present with the past and the future. Han (2020) critiqued the hyper-individualization of modern society as a shift away from collective rituals and synchronized practices. Flexibility in SCL, by contrast, often leads to asynchronous engagement, where students progress at different rates and participate in disparate activities. This lack of synchronization disrupts the rhythm of academic life, making it difficult for students to develop a collective identity or engage in meaningful peer-to-peer interactions.

Moreover, the fragmented nature of flexible learning diminishes opportunities for shared reflection and collaborative inquiry. In SCL, where students engage with varied content and timelines, the absence of such rituals creates an environment where learning becomes an isolated endeavor. The unsynchronized nature of flexible learning also aligns with the neoliberal logic of individual performance and optimization. Lanuza (2022) critiqued this framework for prioritizing efficiency and measurable outcomes over communal well-being. Following Han, what SCL has unintentionally excised from the student's daily lives is the presence of the Other. In Han's analysis, the "Other" encompasses all that lies beyond the self, including difference, negativity, and imperfection. Whereas traditional social frameworks conferred value through encounters with that which is other than oneself, through relationality, ritual, and communal resonance, the narcissistic subject today finds these transcendent sources of meaning systematically eroded.

Consequently, the world, in SCL, the classroom, becomes a solipsistic arena in which only the self and its performance matter, and the rich, rupturing contact with the Other is lost. To lessen the disruptive effects of flexibility, educational institutions must balance personalization with communal synchronization. Structured rituals, such as synchronous discussions and communal projects, can create opportunities for shared experiences within flexible learning models. By integrating these practices, educators can preserve the benefits of flexibility while creating the communal bonds essential for meaningful academic journeys.

C. Technologization and Commodification

Han's (2017) critical reflections on contemporary society's overreliance on technology, particularly in *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects*, provide valuable insights how technologization could affect education. In SCL, technology is often framed as a tool for empowering learners that enables personalized pathways and fosters autonomy. Kerimbayev et al. (2023) emphasize that modern technologies can effectively support a student-centered approach in distance learning by fostering autonomy and engagement. Their systematic review reveals that such integration not only enhances learning outcomes but also aligns with the evolving demands of digital education. However, under Han's lens, this technologization may inadvertently contribute to the erosion of authentic learning experiences, the commodification of education, and the intensification of self-exploitation.

SCL relies heavily on technological tools to create individualized educational experiences. Online platforms, adaptive learning systems, and virtual classrooms are designed to cater to students' unique needs and preferences. While this approach ostensibly empowers learners, Han (2017) warned that digital technologies prioritize efficiency and productivity over depth and reflection. Learning is increasingly reduced to measurable outputs, such as grades, certifications, or completion rates, rather than a transformative intellectual and communal experience. Han (2015) argued that the digital age is characterized by constant activity and the simultaneous performance of multiple tasks. He suggested that this hyperactive environment shapes how individuals process information and engage with technology. More often technological devices hinder the contemplative and focused engagement necessary for genuine learning.

In the hyper-individualized world that has emerged, individuals increasingly turn their evaluative gaze inward and incessantly measure their worth against self-imposed criteria of productivity and optimization. This relentless self-surveillance causes guilt whenever one's actions do not directly contribute to self-improvement. Hence, when the primary focus of the student is their isolated self-efficacy, any academic failure becomes a source of existential suffering. Moreover, the technologization of student-centered learning aligns with the neoliberal logic. Contemporary digital technologies amplify such an inward turn. The ubiquitous availability of self-tracking applications, performance-enhancing platforms, and social-media algorithms encourages constant self-comparison and self-assessment that render individuals ever more vulnerable to affective disorders. Han (2017) argued that the ubiquity of these tools, which are also employed in SCL,

creates a feedback loop whereby heightened self-surveillance causes more anxiety, which in turn drives further reliance on technological “solutions.”

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified this condition by accelerating the digitization of education. Han’s critique of digital temporality, its speed, simultaneity, and lack of depth, finds real-world expression in the Philippine move to online learning platforms. Virtual classrooms erase the symbolic markers of educational space: the threshold of the school, the silence of the library, the gathering of bodies in shared presence. Digital education, while necessary in times of crisis, enforces what Han calls “information without form.” Knowledge is consumed, not cultivated; it circulates without pause, without ritual (Han, 2017). The teacher-student relation becomes a network node, not a site of meaningful encounter. Technological tools also commodify education and reduce it to a transactional relationship between students and digital platforms. Han (2017) observed that digital technologies fragment experiences into isolated, consumable units. This is evident in the modular structure of many online learning systems, where content is divided into micro-lessons designed for quick consumption. While this format may seem to enhance flexibility, it undermines education’s holistic and integrative nature. Han (2020) argued that such fragmentation erodes the relational and ritualistic dimensions of learning, essential for fostering meaning and connection. In SCL, technologization often prioritizes convenience and efficiency at the expense of communal engagement and reflective practices.

Furthermore, Han (2017) highlighted how digital technologies create a culture of distraction and superficiality. The constant connectivity and information overload enabled by technological tools can detract from the deep focus required for meaningful learning. Han (2017) stated, “Digital communication lacks the silence and slowness needed for deep thought” (p. 25). In SCL, where students are often expected to navigate online resources independently, this digital distraction can hinder the cultivation of critical thinking and sustained intellectual engagement. Despite these challenges, Han’s(2020) critique also suggests ways to reclaim the lost dimensions of education within a technologized student-centered model. He emphasized the need for practices that restore depth, presence, and community. This could mean integrating technologies that promote collaboration and dialogue rather than individual educational consumption. For example, digital platforms could facilitate group projects or virtual discussions. Additionally, educators can create spaces for reflective practices that counteract the fragmented and fast-paced nature of digital learning.

In sum, this study has shown that the neoliberal appropriation of student-centered learning (SCL) reconfigures education into a space of individualized performance, self-optimization, and commodified learning. What began as a liberating pedagogy of participation has been transformed into an instrument of control that dissolves the communal and ritual foundations of academic life. Through Han’s critique, it becomes evident that the erosion of rituals and the dominance of technological mediation have fragmented the temporal, relational, and moral dimensions of learning. Education now risks of becoming a series of disconnected tasks driven by efficiency and market relevance. Reclaiming the ritual and communal dimensions of education thus becomes essential to

resist neoliberal rationalities and to restore depth, meaning, and solidarity within the academic lifeworld.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study has addressed its central objective: to examine how the appropriation of student-centered learning (SCL) in Philippine higher education reflects and reinforces the neoliberalization of universities. Anchored in Byung-Chul Han's critique of the achievement society, the analysis has demonstrated that SCL, while conceived as an emancipatory pedagogy aimed at empowering learners, has been reconstituted under neoliberal rationalities that privilege performance, efficiency, and marketability. The transformation of learning into a form of self-optimization reveals how higher education has shifted from a formative and communal enterprise into a commodified pursuit governed by metrics and technological mediation. The de-ritualization of academic spaces mirrors the disappearance of shared practices that once fostered community, contemplation, and moral formation. In responding to this condition, the study calls for the reintegration of academic rituals that restore the relational and reflective dimensions of education. These rituals may include academic dialogues, mentorship, and collective inquiry. These practices may counterbalance the hyper-individualism embedded in neoliberal informed pedagogy. They serve not merely as nostalgic recoveries of tradition but as critical pedagogical practices that reorient learning toward the formation of persons within communities of meaning.

However, this work acknowledges its limitations. The analysis has been primarily theoretical and interpretive since this study relies much on philosophical and policy literature without empirical or institutional data. Future studies may extend this inquiry through ethnographic or institutional research that examines how SCL is enacted in actual classrooms and how educators negotiate its neoliberal tendencies. Recognizing these limitations clarifies the scope of the present study while affirming its contribution to the philosophical critique of education. Ultimately, the findings reiterate the need to reimagine SCL beyond neoliberal imperatives and reclaim higher education learning as ritualized, communal, and transformative practice that nurtures both human depth and shared intellectual life.

V. REFERENCES

- Armbruster, P., Patel, M., Johnson, E., & Weiss, M. (2009). Active learning and student-centered pedagogy improve student attitudes and performance in introductory biology. *CBE – Life Sciences Education*, 8(3), 203–213.
<https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.09-03-0025>
- Apple, M. W. (2004). *Ideology and Curriculum*. Routledge.
- Ball, S. J. (2012). *Global Education Inc.: New Policy Networks and the Neo-liberal Imaginary*. Routledge.
- Barton, K. C., & Levstik, L. S. (2004). *Teaching history for the common good*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410610508>

- Biesta, G. J. J. (2010). *Good education in an age of measurement: Ethics, politics, democracy*. Routledge.
- Commission on Higher Education. (2020). CHED Memorandum Order No. 04, series of 2020: *Guidelines on the implementation of flexible learning*. <https://ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/CMO-No.-4-s.-2020-Guidelines-on-the-Implementation-of-Flexible-Learning.pdf>
- Commission on Higher Education. (2022). CHED Memorandum Order No. 06, series of 2022: *Sustaining flexible learning in higher education (An addendum to CMO No. 4, series of 2020)*. <https://ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/CMO-NO.-6-S.-2022.pdf>
- Commission on Higher Education. (2017a). CHED Memorandum Order No. 74, series of 2017: *Policies, standards, and guidelines for the Bachelor of Science in Biology program*. <https://ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CMO-No.-74-s.-2017.pdf>
- Commission on Higher Education. (2017b). CHED Memorandum Order No. 75, series of 2017: *Policies, standards, and guidelines for the Bachelor of Science in Physics program*. <https://ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CMO-No.-75-s.-2017.pdf>
- Commission on Higher Education. (2017c). CHED Memorandum Order No. 76, series of 2017: *Policies, standards, and guidelines for the Bachelor of Science in Chemistry program*. <https://ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CMO-No.-76-s.-2017.pdf>
- Commission on Higher Education. (2017d). CHED Memorandum Order No. 77, series of 2017: *Policies, standards, and guidelines for the Bachelor of Science in Mathematics program*. <https://ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CMO-No.-77-s.-2017.pdf>
- Commission on Higher Education. (2017e). CHED Memorandum Order No. 78, series of 2017: *Policies, standards, and guidelines for the Bachelor of Science in Applied Mathematics program*. <https://ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CMO-No.-78-s.-2017.pdf>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Macmillan.
- Dewey, J. (2004). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education* (reprint ed.). Free Press.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniv. ed.). Continuum / Bloomsbury Academic.
- Giroux, H. A. (2001). *Theory and resistance in education: Towards a pedagogy for the opposition*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Giroux, H. A. (2014). *Neoliberalism's war on higher education*. Haymarket Books.
- Giroux, H. A. (2020). *Teachers as intellectuals: Toward a critical pedagogy of learning* (Revised ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Griffiths, D., & Prozesky, M. (2020). Reconceptualising teaching as transformative practice: Alasdair MacIntyre in the South African context. *Journal of Education*, (79). <https://doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i79a01>
- Hadiyanto, H. (2024). Application of student-centered learning in improving Teaching English as a Foreign Language students' 21st-century skills performance. *Education Sciences*, 14(9), 938. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14090938>
- Han, B.-C. (2017). *In the swarm: Digital prospects*. MIT Press.
- Han, B.-C. (2015). *The burnout society*. Stanford University Press.
- Han, B.-C. (2020). *The disappearance of rituals: A topology of the present*. Polity Press.
- Hart, P. (2022). Reinventing character education: The potential for participatory character education using MacIntyre's ethics. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 54(4), 486–500. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2021.1998640>
- Harari, Y. N. (2018). *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. Spiegel & Grau.
- Hattie, J., & Donoghue, G. M. (2016). Learning strategies: A synthesis and conceptual model. *npj Science of Learning*, 1, 16013. <https://doi.org/10.1038/npjscilearn.2016.13>
- Hipolito, Y. E. C., Cathleen Joyce, T., Gabriel, C. V. I., & Verayo, E. J. B. (2023). *Battle of the Gr8's: A game-based strategy to improve academic writing skills of Grade 8 learners*. *Journal of Social Sciences and Management Studies*, 2(4), 58–71. <https://doi.org/10.56556/jssms.v2i4.582>
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1999). Making cooperative learning work. *Theory Into Practice*, 38(2), 67–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849909543834>
- Kerimbayev, N., Umirzakova, Z., Shadiev, R., et al. (2023). A student-centered approach using modern technologies in distance learning: A systematic review of the literature. *Smart Learning Environments*, 10(1), 61. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-023-00280-8>
- Lanuza, G. (2022). Neo-fascism as the apparatus of Neoliberalism's assault on Philippine Higher Education: Towards an anti-fascist pedagogy. *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, 16(1), 145–170. <https://doi.org/10.25138/16.1.a7>
- Lareau, A. (2011). *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. University of California Press.
- Pascua, G. C. (2022). The moribund university: The Marcosian foundations of Philippine neoliberal higher education. *Pinkian: Journal of the Ateneo de Manila University*, 7(2), 41–68.
- Manthalu, C. H., & Waghid, Y. (Eds.). (2019). *Education for decoloniality and decolonisation in Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- MacIntyre, A. C. (2007). *After virtue: A study in moral theory* (3rd ed.). University of Notre Dame Press.
- McLaren, P. (2015). *Critical pedagogy and predatory culture: Oppositional politics in a postmodern era* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Mula-Falcón, J., & Caballero, K. (2022). Neoliberalism and its impact on academics: A qualitative review. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 27(3), 373–390. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2022.2076053>

- Noddings, N. (2005). *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*. Teachers College Press.
- Roberts, P. (2016). *Paulo Freire and the politics of education: A response to Neumann*. Educational Philosophy and Theory, 48(6), 553-564. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2015.1104887>
- Sannadan, J. G. M., & Lang-ay, P. L. D. (2021). Neoliberal restructuring in Philippine education: Towards performativity. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 6(1), 355-366. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.61.45>
- San Juan, D. M. M. (2016). Neoliberal restructuring of education in the Philippines: Dependency, labor, privatization, critical pedagogy, and the K to 12 system. *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, 16(1), 80-110. <https://doi.org/10.59588/2350-8329.1072>
- Schwab, K. (2017). *The fourth industrial revolution*. Portfolio Penguin.
- Spring, J. (2016). *American Education*. Routledge.
- Thompson K. (2004). *Readings from Emile Durkheim*. (2nd ed.) Routledge.
- Weimer, M. (2013). *Learner-centered teaching: Five key changes to practice*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory into Practice*, 41(2), 64-70. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4102_2