

Banig Weaving: A Source of Livelihood and Cultural Identity in Basey Samar

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Abstract

This study explores the socio-economic and cultural significance of banig (mat) weaving in Basey, Samar, Philippines. Specifically, it investigates how banig weaving serves as a primary source of livelihood and a vital expression of cultural identity for local artisans. The study employed a qualitative research approach. Data collection through semi-structured interviews and drew on comprehensive responses from women weavers. Findings reveal that banig weaving is deeply ingrained in Basey's cultural heritage, forming a symbol of cultural identity and pride. It is an inherited traditional craft handed down through generations. From a financial perspective, it sustains many families, especially women, and contributes to community-based tourism and economic opportunities. However, challenges that threaten its continuity include a lack of interest among the younger generation, as modern technology may limit their engagement with the craft. It also emphasized the important role of women weavers in banig weaving industry and highlighting the preservation practices to safeguard the craft and ensure its sustainable endurance. Thus, preserving this tradition strengthens the cultural identity and sustains the livelihood of Basey, Samar community.

Keywords: banig weaving; cultural identity; livelihood; cultural preservation; rural economy

1. Introduction

Banig weaving in Basey, Samar, is more than a craft—it is a living tradition passed down through generations. The intricate process of hand-weaving mats from locally sourced tikog reeds not only provides economic sustenance to many families but also serves as a powerful symbol of local identity and artistic expression.

The research explores the importance of banig weaving in Basey, Samar, Philippines, emphasizing its function as a vital source of income and a marker of cultural identity. The study looks into the economic effects of banig weaving on the local economy, its cultural significance and preservation efforts.

1.1. Background of the Study

The Philippines and other Southeast Asian cultures place a high value on banig, a handwoven mat. Traditionally constructed from organic materials such as seagrass fronds, buri palm, or pandan, a banig is used for sitting, sleeping, and decorative purposes. The primary material used for banig weaving in Basey, Samar, is tikog grass, a unique reed found in swampy places. Women weavers, known as "Parag Lara" are essential to the continuation of the skill, which has been practiced in Basey from pre-colonial times and has been passed down through the generations (word press, n.d).

The banig is constructed of dried leaves and mostly used for sitting and sleeping in the Philippines. In weaving, material strips are folded over to create distinctive geometric patterns. The plants used in banig weaving thrive in the Philippines' tropical climate. The Filipinos make the mats out of rattan, palm trees, and different kinds of reeds that grow in swampy places. The high-quality, soft, and flexible leaves are adorned with a variety of patterns made from colorfully dyed straws. The matting materials are typically treated with bleaching substances and dried in the sunlight. These are done to give the materials a brown tone and strength.

In addition to its traditional uses for sitting and sleeping, the banig is also used by Filipinos as a floor mat, to

package tobacco for export, and to dry copra in the sun. In more recent times, the mat itself can be shaped to fulfil a variety of functions. Filipinos creatively use banig weavings to create hats, slippers, tissue holders, bags, wall hanging decorations, and more. Moreover, the origins of mat weaving in Basey, Samar are unclear, however it predates the arrival of the Spaniards. The Moros also used the sleeping mats, as did the Christian regions. Due to its widespread practice throughout the nation, banig weaving is regarded as a true treasure that has been passed down as a custom or trade from one generation to the next. Filipino creativity is seen in their designs, which are influenced by regional customs (cclstaff, 2020).

Festivals are one opportunity to display handwoven mats manufactured in the Philippines. One of the most well-known events is Basey, Samar's Banigan-Kawayan Festival Parade. Basaynons took part in weaving the longest banig in the world in 2000. The carpet stretched over a kilometer and was paraded by hundreds of people.

The Banig Festival (Cebu), the Banigan Festival (Antique), the Banigan Festival (Guimaras), and the Buri Festival (Ilocos Sur) are additional regional celebrations that take place all year long. The idea behind all of these festivals is that banig weaving is a significant source of income for the community and that it is a custom that should be valued and preserved for upcoming generations (cclstaff, 2020).

Despite of limited studies in banig (mat) weaving industry, this study aims to examine the dual role of banig weaving as a livelihood strategy, a vehicle for cultural identity in Basey and heritage preservation. The study explores the origin, cultural significance, economic contribution of banig weaving in local households and how the community preserve the traditional craft despite of challenges. The results of study will help to understand the importance of cultural heritage in the community of Basey, Samar and continue to maintain the traditional craft in the next generation.

1.2. Research Objectives

The research objectives are focused on:

1. **The History and Origins of Banig Weaving in Basey:** This research explores the historical roots of banig weaving in the region, tracing its origins, and understanding how it evolved over time.
2. **The Economic Importance of Banig Weaving:** This research examines the economic contributions of banig weaving to the community, including income generation, employment opportunities, and its role in the local economy.
3. **The Cultural Significance of Banig Weaving:** This research would delve into the cultural significance of banig weaving, exploring its role in preserving traditional knowledge, community identity, and cultural heritage.
4. **Challenges and Opportunities Facing the Banig Industry:** This study investigates the challenges faced by the banig industry. It also explores opportunities for growth and development.
5. **The Role of Local Government and Organizations:** This study explores the role of the local government and organizations in supporting the banig industry, including initiatives to promote the craft, provide training and livelihood.

Overall, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of banig weaving in the lives of the people of Basey, Samar, highlighting its economic, cultural, and social significance.

1.3. Significance of the Study

This study holds significance for several reasons:

1. **Preserving Cultural Heritage:** Banig weaving is a vital part of Basey's cultural heritage, passed down through generations. This research helps document and understand the intricate techniques, designs, and cultural significance of this traditional craft, ensuring its preservation for future generations.
2. **Economic Empowerment:** The study highlights the economic importance of banig weaving as a source of livelihood for many Basey residents, particularly women. By understanding the challenges and opportunities facing the industry, the research can inform strategies to improve economic conditions for weavers and promote sustainable growth.
3. **Community Development:** The research sheds light on the role of banig weaving in community identity and social cohesion. By exploring the social dynamics and collaborative efforts involved in the industry, the study can contribute to community development initiatives that support the craft and empower local artisans.
4. **Tourism and Cultural Promotion:** The research can contribute to promoting Basey as a destination for cultural tourism, showcasing the unique craftsmanship and heritage of banig weaving. This can attract visitors, generate income for the community, and raise awareness about the importance of preserving traditional crafts.

5. **Policy and Advocacy:** The findings of the research can inform policy decisions and advocacy efforts to support the banig industry. By providing evidence-based insights, the study can help secure resources, training programs, and market access for weavers, ensuring the long-term viability of this traditional craft.

Overall, the research on "Banig Weaving: A Source of Livelihood and Cultural Identity in Basey, Samar" is crucial for understanding the multifaceted significance of this traditional craft and for supporting its sustainable development and preservation.

2. Review of Related Literature

This review of literature looks into existing studies on indigenous weaving practices, cultural preservation, and their role in supporting rural economies. By exploring local and national contexts, this section establishes the framework for traditional interconnectedness, community identity, challenges and economic sustainability.

Weaving is an old traditional craft, practiced in the Philippines for many centuries, and has been handed down through generations (Villareal, 2023). This tradition ingrained in the culture of several indigenous groups and regions that have their own pattern reflecting their history or way of life, and (Taculao, 2020).

Banig weaving is an important cultural heritage in Basey, Samar, and has developed into an industry over diverse centuries, driven by the availability of raw materials (Diaz, 2024). This municipality is the center of mat making, famous for its alluring colors and affordable prices of mats (Baradas, 2004). The women of Basey play a crucial role in the banig industry; their weaving skills combine various colors to form harmonious designs that enhance the beauty of the products (Escoda, 1953). The design and motif of a banig weaver usually consist of versions of flowers, and a mat may represent a local or foreign public figure. However, the "portrait mat" is difficult to pass on to the next generation due to its highly specialized artistic skills. Likewise, embroidery is a technique used to create a banig by inserting designs into the plain, fully woven mat (Baradas, 2004). Consequently, the weavers prefer to weave in a cool temperature to maintain the softness and flexibility of dried tikog grass (Go, 2020). Women weave the leaves together, ensuring the strength of every leaf by pulling it before incorporating it into a whole mat, so that the durability of the mat is not meant to be ignored (Escoda, 1953). Banig weaving is a testament to the woven narrative of cultural identity and heritage of Basey. The craftsmanship of women weavers symbolizes dedication to preserving the traditional craft in shaping the weaving culture.

The banig weaving tradition is not only an artistic expression but also plays a significant role in defining the cultural identity of the local community. It provides a source of livelihood to the local economy. Cuaton (2019) discusses the contribution of the tikog handicraft industry in Basey, which provides livelihood and additional income for farming families, particularly women in the communities. The industry supported different stakeholders, encouraging community engagement and development. According to Cacho et al. (2025), weaving remains a cultural pride and identity. Simultaneously, it is a significant source of livelihood security for elderly women weavers who continue to make economic contributions to their households. This cultural heritage and a livelihood carry the community identity and resilience. They emphasize the multidimensional impact of weaving on the physical, economic, social, and governance aspects of the lives of elderly women weavers in rural communities.

Aside from economic contributions and cultural significance of banig weaving, it faces challenges that threaten the continuity of the traditional craft and heritage preservation. Diaz (2014) mentioned the issues that affect the production of banig industry such as lack of technological supports from public sector, negative perspective of the new generations to connect this industry and insufficient man-made tikog farm. Monte et al. (2022) noted that the problem of preserving the banig weaving culture was identified due to gradual decline to a certain level and rare appreciation of banig making. Some causes include the reduction of appreciation of banig, decreasing youth engagement, low quality income, fewer tikog farmers, and restrictions during the pandemic. In addition, other specific factors were "passing down the culture to the next generation, adaptation to changing times, and the perspective of the majority". Lopez (2022) asserted that the apprehension of women weavers among the young generation was the lack of interest in learning the art of weaving, which was associated with reasons such as an opportunity to find work with a high-paying job, and temptations related to the internet, technology, and other forms of activities that could limit the involvement of the young generation in the traditional weaving industry. Local artisans face the issue of cultural degradation, as the transmission of knowledge to the young generation in producing intricate handicrafts is at risk.

The importance of preservation efforts, initiatives, and promotions helps maintain the cultural identity, heritage, and livelihood sustainability of banig weaving in local communities. For instance, the study titled "The Mat –Weavers' Legacy: Preservation and Promotion of Basey, Samar Banig Culture" focused on mat "tikog" industry in Basey, Samar has a diverse extent level of awareness in relation to legislative initiatives, the proposed House Bill 6566 ("The Act Developing the Tikog Industry") which proclaiming the Municipality of Basey as the Banig Capital of the Philippines to recognize and

provide funds for education and promotion the culture of the banig weaving industry. It highlights cultural practices, identity, and economic importance. The interventions of local governments and various stakeholders focus on preservation and promotion processes, which are being done with the inclusion of banig weaving in educational programs and promotional activities to increase the interest of young generations and appreciation of the banig, ensuring that the cultural legacy continues in the local community. Hence, youth participation is persistently encouraged to engage in the industry, considering it a great factor in preserving cultural heritage for future generations (Monte et al., 2022). The results reveal a rich cultural heritage tied to the banig weaving industry in Basey, Samar, as opportunities presented by legislative support and local government initiatives to promote and preserve the industry. This suggests that these interventions are vital for fostering community engagement and continuous support from both the community and local government to revitalize and guarantee the sustainability of banig weaving traditions. In contrast, Cacho et al. (2025) concluded that a multifaceted approach is recommended to secure the preservation and continuation of traditional weaving practices. Therefore, it is essential to establish necessary intergenerational learning programs, prioritize sustainable raw material resources, improve market access, practice fair trade, support the health and well-being of elder weavers, uphold cultural governance, and formally recognize the cultural significance of weaving to ensure sustainability.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The research will employ a qualitative research method for data collection to explore the historical relevance, economic effect, and cultural value of banig weaving will be investigated through interviews with banig weavers.

The study utilized a case study approach. This design is suitable for understanding complex phenomena in their natural settings, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the banig weaving culture and its socio-economic impacts on the community of Basey, Samar.

3.2. Research Locale

Data collection took place in Barangay Basiao. This area has been identified for the active participation of weavers in the banig weaving industry for gathering relevant data.

3.3. Sampling Method

The researchers utilized purposive sampling technique in selecting participants who have direct knowledge and experience in the banig industry. This method is effective for qualitative research where specific characteristics of participants are required to gain deeper insights.

3.4. Research Participant

The participants are the banig weavers involved in promoting and preserving the banig industry. A total of five interviewees were selected to provide diverse perspectives on the practices, livelihood opportunities, challenges and preservation of banig weaving.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing for both prepared and spontaneous questions to facilitate a deeper discussion. The interviews were conducted in the local language to ensure participants could express their thoughts freely, followed by contextual translation for analysis.

3.6. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns in themes through responses of participants related to the impact of banig weaving on livelihood, as cultural identity, challenges, and sustainability strategies. This method helps in identifying patterns, meanings and interprets the results relevant to the research study.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

In conducting the study ethical considerations must be observed to ensure responsible and respectful research. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and provided consent to be interviewed. Ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, the collected information and responses were protected and used for academic and research purposes.

3.8. Expected Outcomes

This research is expected to produce the following outcomes:

1. A thorough understanding of the cultural and historical significance of Basey, Samar banig weaving.
2. An evaluation of the financial effects of banig weaving on the neighborhood, taking into account the creation of jobs and revenue.
3. An overview of the difficulties banig weavers encounter and the methods used to keep the craft alive and thriving.
4. Suggestions for using banig weaving in Basey, Samar, to support economic empowerment and sustainable development.

4. Results and Discussion

The data collection in this study aims to understand livelihood and the cultural identity of Basey, Samar reflecting the traditional art of Banig weaving and its heritage preservation. Using a qualitative approach and open-ended questions, the researcher explored the background of Banig, its role as a source of livelihood, and its importance to the cultural identity of the people of Basey, Samar.

4.1 Banig Weaving A Source of Livelihood

1. Primary and Supplementary Livelihood

Banig weaving serves as the primary source of income for women weavers in Brgy. Basiao, Basey, Samar, and some nearby places of the municipality. It provides significant financial support, particularly in sustaining their children's education, addressing the household's basic needs, covering other essential expenses.

"An paglara hin banig an akon pinaka-source han akon income kay dako ini nabulig ha amon pamilya. Anhi nam ginkukuha tanan na pangastos sugad han pag-eskwela han amon mga anak."

-Participant 1

"Asya ini it akon pakabuhi kay bisan magmaraot it panahon mayda la gihap kami trabaho kay anhi la kami tam lugar diri na mabiyahe ngan mayda la gihap kami kita, dako ini nabulig hit akon pamilya."

-Participant 3

For some women weavers, it is regarded as a supplementary livelihood, as poverty compels them to seek additional sources of income to support their families.

"Ini nga paglara diri gud asya tak pakabuhi, namimiling gihap ako hin iba na trabaho tungod hit kapobrehan yana"

-Participant 2

2. Income Generation for Mat Weavers

Traditional banig weaving plays a vital role in sustaining the basic needs of households in the community. The craft not only preserves cultural heritage but also provides a vital source of income for families. According to a woman weaver, whenever there are buyers, the income generated from the sale of woven mats directly contributes to meeting their essential household expenses, such as food, clothing, and other daily necessities. This financial support, though modest, alleviates the burden of poverty and enables their families to secure resources necessary for their well-being. Thus, banig weaving serves as both an economic activity and a cultural practice that strengthens the resilience of families in times of

financial difficulty.

“Pag napapalit an banig nakakakwarta kami tapos nakakapalit liwat kami han amon panginahanglan ha balay sanglit dako ini nabulig labi na an pagpaeskwela han amon mga anak.”

-Participant 2

3. Livelihood to Cultural Tourism

Traditional banig weaving contributes to the progress of the community in Basey, Samar, as its recognition can promote cultural awareness, tourism and economic opportunities. When more people become familiar with the craft, it has the potential to gain popularity not only in neighboring municipalities and cities but even on a global scale. Such recognition can open avenues for financial support, as government agencies, private institutions, and other organizations may provide livelihood assistance to sustain and further develop the weaving industry, which in turn can lead to job creation and increased income for local artisans.

“Agi hini nga banig nakilala an amon barangay, ngan an amon munisipyo. Natagan kami hin hinabang tikang ha DOLE ngan nakilala gihap an Saob Cave kon diin kami naglalara han mga banig. Damo gihap an kumanhi na mga turista para mahimo nga tourist spot an amon lugar.”

-Participant 3

4.2 Banig Weaving A Cultural Identity and Tradition

1. Inherited Traditional Craft

Banig weaving is a traditional practice that has been transmitted from generation to generation. The women weavers' weaving skill is inherited within families, as parents pass on their knowledge and techniques to their children. At an early age, children are already introduced to the craft, ensuring the continuity of this cultural heritage over time.

“An akon nanay an nagtutdo ha akon, 7 years old ako nagtikang paglara.”

-Participant 1

“Tikang ha akon mga ka apoy-apoyan nabaro ako paglara, kay hira mag aram man sanglit gintutduan liwat ako.”

-Participant 2

2. Unique Craftsmanship and Identity

In banig weaving, they can create their own designs. It allows them to show their talent and originality in making beautiful patterns through combining various colors that reflects artistry, craftsmanship of women weavers, culture and tradition.

“oo, mayda design para maupay.”

-Participant 1

“oo, mas maupay kasi an imo kalugaringon design kay may originality.”

-Participant 2

“Nakakahimo ako hin design pinaagi han iba-iba na color combination.”

-Participant 3

Traditional banig weaving in the community of Basey holds great significance as a cultural heritage that must be preserved for future generations. For many women it serves as the primary source of livelihood providing both economic support and empowerment. Moreover, this craft has brought recognition to the municipality since this century old tradition keeps on producing stunning handicrafts and making Basey, Samar becomes Banig Capital of the Philippines.

“Kinahanglan may masunod, diri mawara an paglara hin banig.”

-Participant 1

Tungod han paglara han banig, asya ini an usa pakabuhi han mga kababayin-an nganhi ha Basey.”

-Participant 2

“Tungod han paglara han mga banig ngan paghimo han mga mag-upay na bag, nakilala an bungto han Basey ngan naging Banig Capital of the Philippines.”

-Participant 3

4.3 Weaving Heritage Preservation

1. Challenges and Continuity of Weaving Heritage

Women weavers noted that Traditional banig weaving in the town of Basey continues to endure as parents pass on the craft to their children, ensuring the preservation of skills across generations. Weaving is an alternative source of livelihood because it is hard to find a job. However, its sustainability is challenged by the influence of modern technology,

such as gadgets that the young generation is not willing to learn in weaving. In this context, shifting interests and career preferences pose concerns regarding the continuity of this traditional practice.

"Oo, kay it akon anak gintutduan ko liwat paglara yana maaram na hiya."

-Participant 1

"Yana nga panahon makuri man magbiling hin trabaho, sanglit mayda pagpipilian an iba na maging pakabuhi an paglara hin banig."

-Participant 2

"Diri na sugad kadamo an napatutdo paglara na mga kabatan-unan, tungod hit aton panahon yana,nauso na it gadgets nalilibang hira."

-Participant 3

Furthermore, the responses below emphasize that nowadays some young people are willing to learn traditional mat weaving, which provides income opportunities and a pastime activity, especially those who are out of school. However, others are not interested due to modern technology, such as gadgets, different ways of thinking, and also influenced by their social environment, which limits the young generations from engaging in traditional banig weaving.

"It iba diri interesado tungod hit gadgets."

-Participant 1

"An iba nga mga batan-on na waray makaeskwela, ginhihimo nira na libangan an paglara hin banig, para liwat hira magkamay-ada pakabuhi."

-Participant 3

Women who practice traditional banig weaving in Basey encourage the young generation to continue this tradition as they support and explain that weaving is part of the Senior High School curriculum. They provide compensation for the youth to participate in banig weaving instead of wasting their time on other things that will not benefit them. They highlight that joining this handwoven craft can also serve as their part-time work during free time or when there are no classes. Thus, these approaches help the young generations to continue the banig weaving industry in their community, and preserving this tradition strengthens their cultural identity.

"Maglalara ito it iba kay upod na ha curriculum han senior high school an paglara."

-Participant 1

"Gin -aaghat namon an iba na mga kabataan hin paglara ngan gintatagan hin suhol nga kuwarta para maruyag hira kaysa hit adto la hira hit barkada lugod."

-Participant 2

"Ginpapabulig nam it kabataan labi na kon waray klase."

-Participant 3

2. Maintaining Its Traditional Methods and Practice

Women weavers emphasized that to preserve the art of banig weaving, efforts are being made to maintain its traditional form and ensure that its quality remains consistent over time. Preservation practices include drying under the sun, applying artificial coloring to enhance durability, and storing them in cool places to prevent damage. These methods help safeguard the craft and allow it to endure across generations.

"Pareho la gihap an kurte han banig diri mabag-o."

-Participant 1

"Adi kami naglalara han banig ha Saob Cave kay mataghum."

-Participant 2

"Ginbubulad namon ngan gintitina an banig."

-Participant 3

3. Preserving Cultural Identity and Livelihood

People in Basey believe that banig weaving plays an important role in preserving their cultural identity and livelihood. Their municipality is recognized for this unique craft, making it a source of pride for the community. Since the tradition has been passed down from their older generations, they are confident that it will continue to be practiced, especially by the youth, into the next generations. With the support of the community, the art of banig weaving will remain alive and will not disappear in the future.

"Dinhi kami nakilala, dinhi kami namulat, kanan amon pa ini mga ninuno tikang."

-Participant 1

"Oo, kay tungod han banig/tikog an bungto han Basey nakilala."

-Participant 2

"Oo, it paglara han banig diri na ini mawawara ha kultura ngan ngada hit kahasta."

-Participant 3

Banig weavers' persuasion to the younger generations is not to be bored and not giving up the ambition to improve the product income of banig and encouraging the youth to remain committed to continue the culture of weaving. Aside from

convincing the youth in banig weaving, unemployed mothers are also encouraged to participate in weaving to help their family's needs. These initiatives implies that banig weavers are exerting their continuous efforts to preserve the traditional banig, which defines the cultural identity and livelihood sustainability of the people of Basey

“Obligahon an mga kabataan paglara para diri mawara ini nga kultura.”

-Participant 1

“Diri magsawa, diri umundang hit ambisyon, ngan humataas an income han banig.”

-Participant 2

“Gin-aaghat an mga kabatan-unan nga maglara labi na an diri kaya paeskwelahon han ira mga kag-anak. Gin-aaghat gihapon an mga nanay nga waray trabaho na maglara para makabulig hit ira pamilya.

-Participant 3

5. Conclusions

The research revealed that banig weaving in Basey, Samar, is a deeply ingrained tradition, a symbol of cultural identity. Since, weaving is passed down through generations. Women weavers' skills are inherited from their parents and introduced at a young age. Through their talents, they can create unique designs by combining distinct colors that reflect the traditional craftsmanship and local culture. Traditional banig weaving is not only a craft, but also a vital source of livelihood for many women and families. It provides income to address local household essential needs, both an economic activity and a cultural practice that strengthens the resilience of families in times of financial difficulty.

This weaving heritage has a significant impact on cultural tourism in the local community of Basey, Samar, acknowledging that this culture promotes cultural awareness, increases tourism, and economic opportunities as local government and other various organizations provide livelihood assistance for sustaining the weaving industry, leading to job creation and increased income to local artisans.

The findings of the study emphasized the challenges of banig weaving culture. The young generations were lack of interest in learning the craft due to the influence of modern technology, such as gadgets that could limit their engagement in traditional banig weaving. However, other youths have been interested in the tradition because it provides income and a pastime activity. Banig weavers' strategy is to encourage the youth to continue learning weaving. Preserving this tradition strengthens the cultural identity and sustains the livelihood of Basey, Samar, community

In this way, Preservation practicess were done by women weavers, including drying under the sun, applying artificial coloring to enhance the materials, and storing them in cool places to prevent damage. These efforts maintain the traditional form of banig, and the quality remains consistent.

Furthermore, the Municipality of Basey, Samar, is recognized for its unique craft, making it a source of pride and identity. It is more than a craft, but a tradition that is continually practiced in the next generations and is preserved. As such, efforts to preserve it must be holistic, empowering both craft and the community that sustains it.

Acknowledgements

The researchers extend sincere gratitude to the weavers of Basey, Samar, for sharing their stories and craft for participating during the discussion with openness and enthusiasm and to the Municipal Tourism for their support. This study would not have been possible without their trust and cooperation. Thanks also to the families, friends, classmates and teachers of the researchers who give their full support while having this study. Most thanks to God Almighty for the wisdom and guidance showered to the researchers.

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