



# **Introducing curriculum authenticity**

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# OUTLINE

- Background
- Issues
- Objectives
- Conceptualizing curriculum authenticity
- Applying the model: The case of the business English licence
- Recommendations
- Limitations

# BACKGROUND: AUTHENTICITY IN ELT

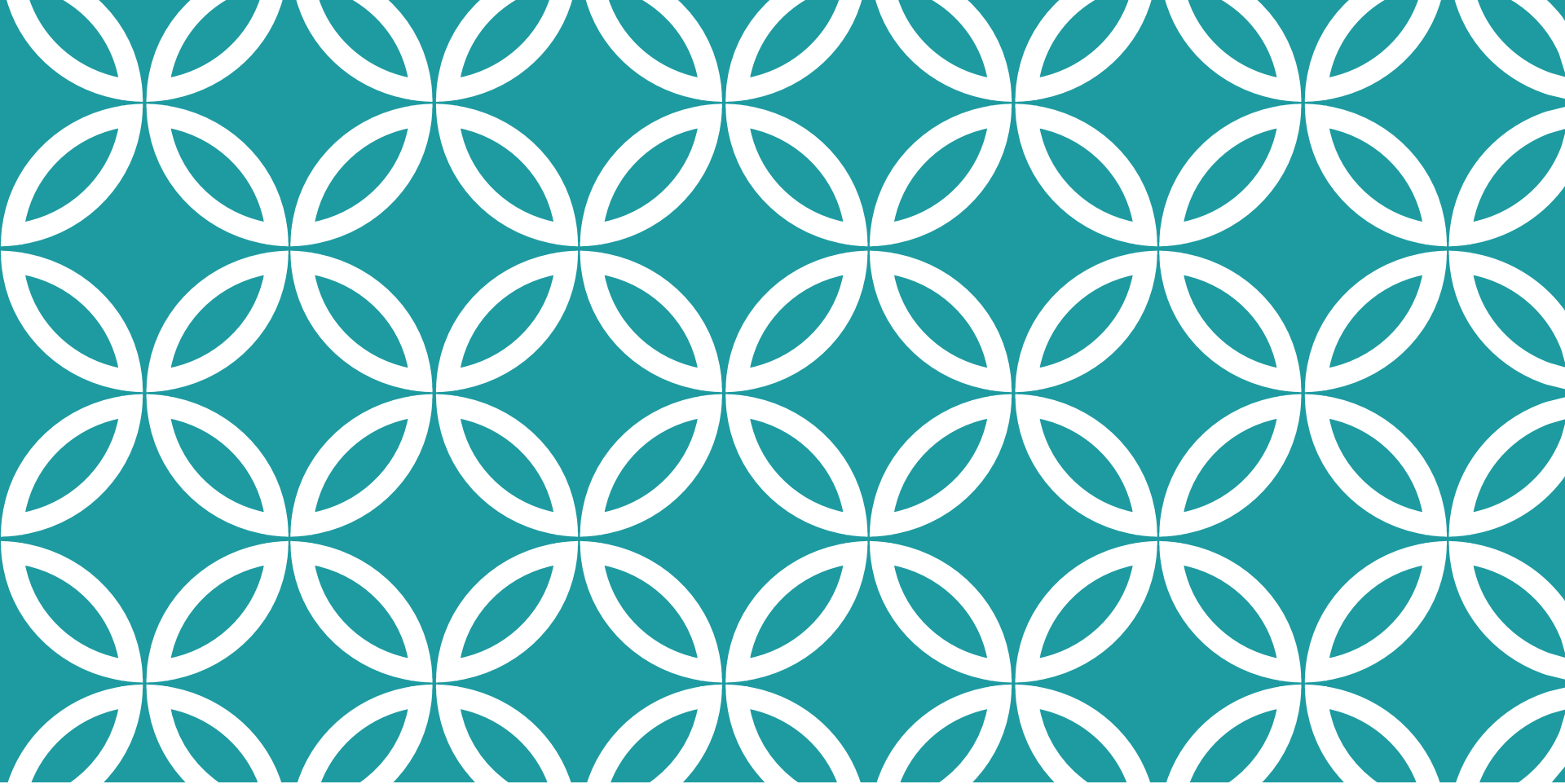
1. A key concept around which language education research and pedagogy revolves.
2. A variety of types: Text, task, classroom, interactional, assessment
3. Authenticity is a multidimensional concept
4. Authenticity is not an independent feature but a locally bound concept (**Widdowson, 1998**)

# ISSUES

- A fragmented view of authenticity
- Tendency to highlight an aspect over another (Trabelsi, 2006)
  - Materials may be « authentic » but above learners' proficiency level (Alshumaimeri and Alzaydi, 2015)
  - Materials may be « authentic » but do not meet learners' needs
- English as a subject versus. English as an academic program
- Specificities of the higher education context → Authenticity of materials is perhaps less at stake here

# OBJECTIVES

- To propose a holistic view of authenticity in ELT based on the notion of “curriculum authenticity”
- To conceptualize and model curriculum authenticity
- To apply the model to the business English curriculum in Tunisia
- To suggest actions to enhance curriculum authenticity
- To point to the challenges this notion and its application present

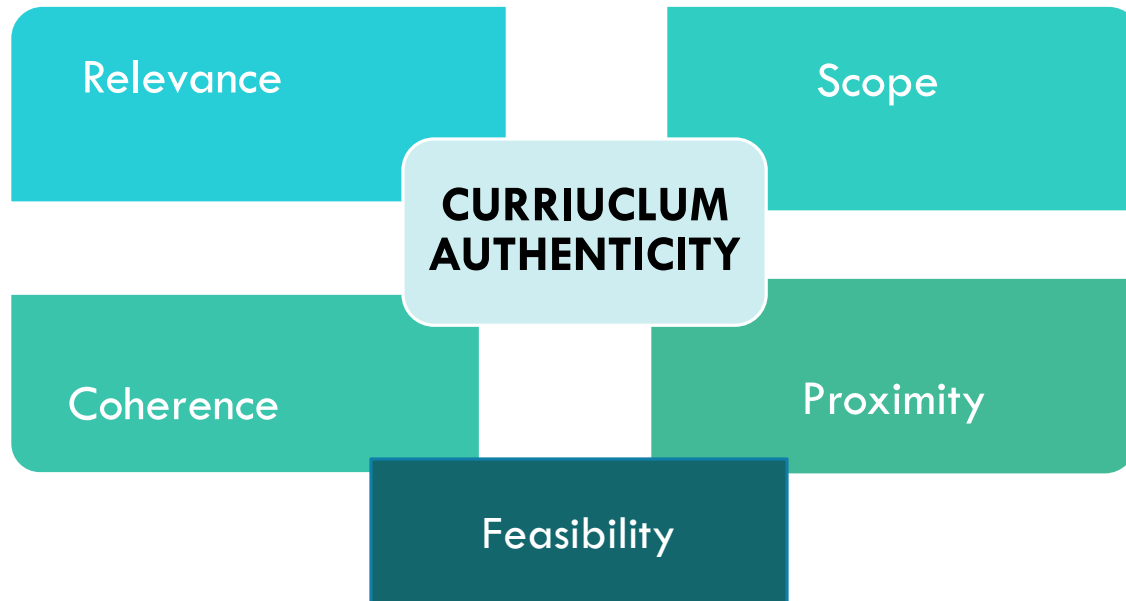


# CONCEPTUALIZING CURRICULUM AUTHENTICITY

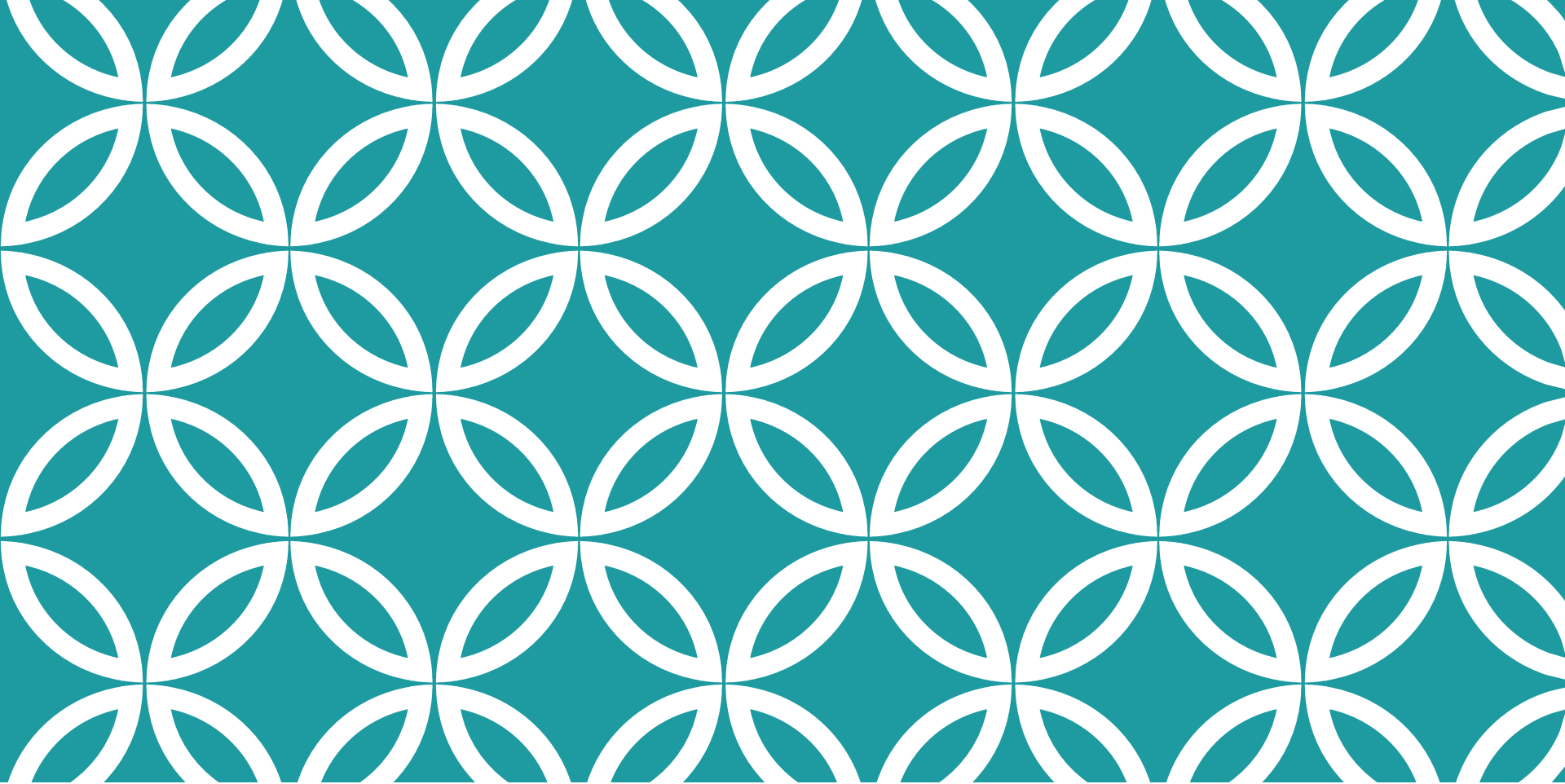
# CURRICULUM DESIGN

- Curriculum: Course design (**micro perspective**) and academic program design (**macro perspective**)  
(Nation & Macalister, 2011)
- Processes of curriculum design: 1) needs analysis (wants/lacks/necessities), 2) environment analysis (learner and teacher profiles and the situation), 3) principles for content and materials selection, sequencing, and assessment, and 4) evaluation (Nation & Macalister, 2011)
- These processes are guided by a set of underlying principles of **relevance, scope, coherence, proximity, and feasibility** → Indicators of curriculum authenticity

# THE PROPOSED MODEL







## APPLYING THE MODEL

# RESEARCH CONTEXT

- Higher education reform in 2006 → Licence/Masters/Doctorate (LMD) Reform
  - Top down reform (Bettaieb et al., 2015)
  - Compliance with the European system of higher education (Bologna reform)
    - Quality and relevance of higher education
    - ICT at the center of the curriculum and learning
- Two tracks: academic and professional degrees

# THE BUSINESS ENGLISH LICENCE

- A three year undergraduate vocational degree designed to train students for the workplace.
- Formative assessment
- Language, skill, and content courses
- Examples: Translation (General and specialized); Business English; commercial English, English for finance, enterprise culture, e-commerce, marketing, etc.

# APPROACH

## 1. Official document analysis

Ministry of Higher Education, Administration of University Reform (2006). The LMD Reform in Tunisia : Guidelines (2006). Retrieved from [http://www.isetkr.rnu.tn/new/pdfs/note de cadrage LMD Version-Francaise.pdf](http://www.isetkr.rnu.tn/new/pdfs/note_de_cadrage_LMD_Version-Francaise.pdf)

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## 2. Analysis of course descriptions

## 3. Professional experience

# NEEDS ANALYSIS → RELEVANCE

- A curriculum is authentic when it is relevant to **the immediate and long term needs** of students (Product oriented)
- A curriculum is authentic when it is relevant to **the learning needs** of students (Process oriented)

# RELEVANCE IN THE BUSINESS ENGLISH LICENCE

- Absence of a statement of objectives in the LMD document for English
- General goal in the LMD policy document

**“Creating flexible and effective programs of study that can be academic or vocational in order to offer to students at all levels possibilities to integrate the professional world”**

- Needs left out for instructors to determine

→ Courses within the curriculum have been designed on existing materials and individual perception of needs

→ Relevance is compromised

# CONTENT SELECTION → SCOPE

Scope: “the breadth and depth of coverage of items” (Richards, 2001, p. 149)

## **Covers knowledge and skills**

**Limited scope skills** applicable to one context/ situation. E. writing the minutes of a meeting

**Broad scope skills** to cope with new, unexpected and unplanned situations. E.g. problem solving tasks

# SCOPE IN THE BUSINESS ENGLISH LICENCE

## ■ Overemphasis on skills

- 31 language and skill courses vs. 18 content courses
- Number of specialized content courses (10) vs. specialized skills courses (12\*)
- Content courses with low coefficient (A total of 5 vs. 16 for skill courses) + not all are tested

→ It is essential to build a knowledge base before moving to applications and development of advanced skills (Valcke, 2016; Wang, 2014)



# CONTENT SEQUENCING → COHERENCE

- A curriculum is authentic if it reflects the **logical progression and unity** of its content
- Two dimensions:
  - Internal Coherence: within the syllabus of a course delivered during a study term
  - External Coherence: for one course stretching over a study term or for different but overlapping courses

# COHERENCE IN THE BUSINESS ENGLISH LICENCE

Typical courses displaying issues of coherence: “Secretarial English” “Business English”- “ESP”- “Communication strategies” –”Corporate Culture”

**Overlap:** Dealing with content more than once across the curriculum

**Gradation:** Dealing with content at one level that is less advanced than the previous level.

**Redundancy:** Having courses stretching over 3 years with no tangible and sometimes counterproductive effects on students.

# BUSINESS ENGLISH LICENCE : COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Course	Year	Semester	Theme/Skill
Business and Commercial English	3rd year	2	Money
Secretarial English	3rd year	1	General finance vocabulary
Secretarial English	3rd year	1	Telephoning skills
ESP	2nd year	1	Telephoning skills
Reading/Writing	2nd year	1	Cover letter for a job application
ESP	2nd year	1	Business ads and letters of application

# ENVIRONMENT/NEEDS ANALYSIS

## → PROXIMITY

- **External Proximity:** Closeness to context of use

“Proximity in time to exposure to authentic models is crucial. Teaching business writing to high school, or even to college, students years before a likely exposure to the relevant contexts constitutes far too long a gap” (Freedman, 1993)

→ Learning experiences should not be remotely authentic from their context of use

- **Internal Proximity:** Appropriateness to learners’ cognitive level (Pienemann, 1985)

# PROXIMITY IN THE BUSINESS ENGLISH LICENCE

- Telephoning and social skills during first or second years → No opportunity to practice and develop those skills in contexts of use (Remotely authentic skills)
- Low English proficiency level upon entry vs. First year translation course

# ENVIRONMENT ANALYSIS → FEASIBILITY

- The need “to distinguish policy, as a statement of aims and objectives, from planning, the attempt to turn a policy statement into action and implementation” (Kennedy, 2001, p. 34).
  - The availability of the infrastructure, equipment and materials, the specification of teaching and learning guidelines, their development through teacher training and learners’ support centers, etc.
- A curriculum is authentic when it is feasible given the resources that can be deployed for its implementation.

# FEASIBILITY IN THE BUSINESS ENGLISH LICENCE

- Formative evaluation **VS.** absence of regulations on absenteeism
- Requirements of independent learning **VS.** Course hour volume (17 hours over 5/6 days per week) and an inadequate infrastructure for the use of ICT in education
- Lack of content specialist instructors:
  - Two courses are not implemented
  - Only 4 out of 10 specialized content courses are taught in English

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Policies need to be thought together with teachers and administrators of higher education
- Creating data based professional profiles (Huhta, Vogt, Johnson and Tulkki, 2013) → long term needs of students
- Need to develop a knowledge base among students: Combining content and task based approaches for vocational courses
- Coordination ACROSS the curriculum



# LIMITATIONS

- Difficulty to authenticate learning experiences in EFL contexts.  
→ Difficulty to identify “local English-using situations in which a task can be authentically contextualized” (Chan, 2013)
- Possibility for a conflict between two indicators of curriculum authenticity
- Developing evaluation instruments to assess the criteria (Tomlinson, 2012)
- Other indicators?

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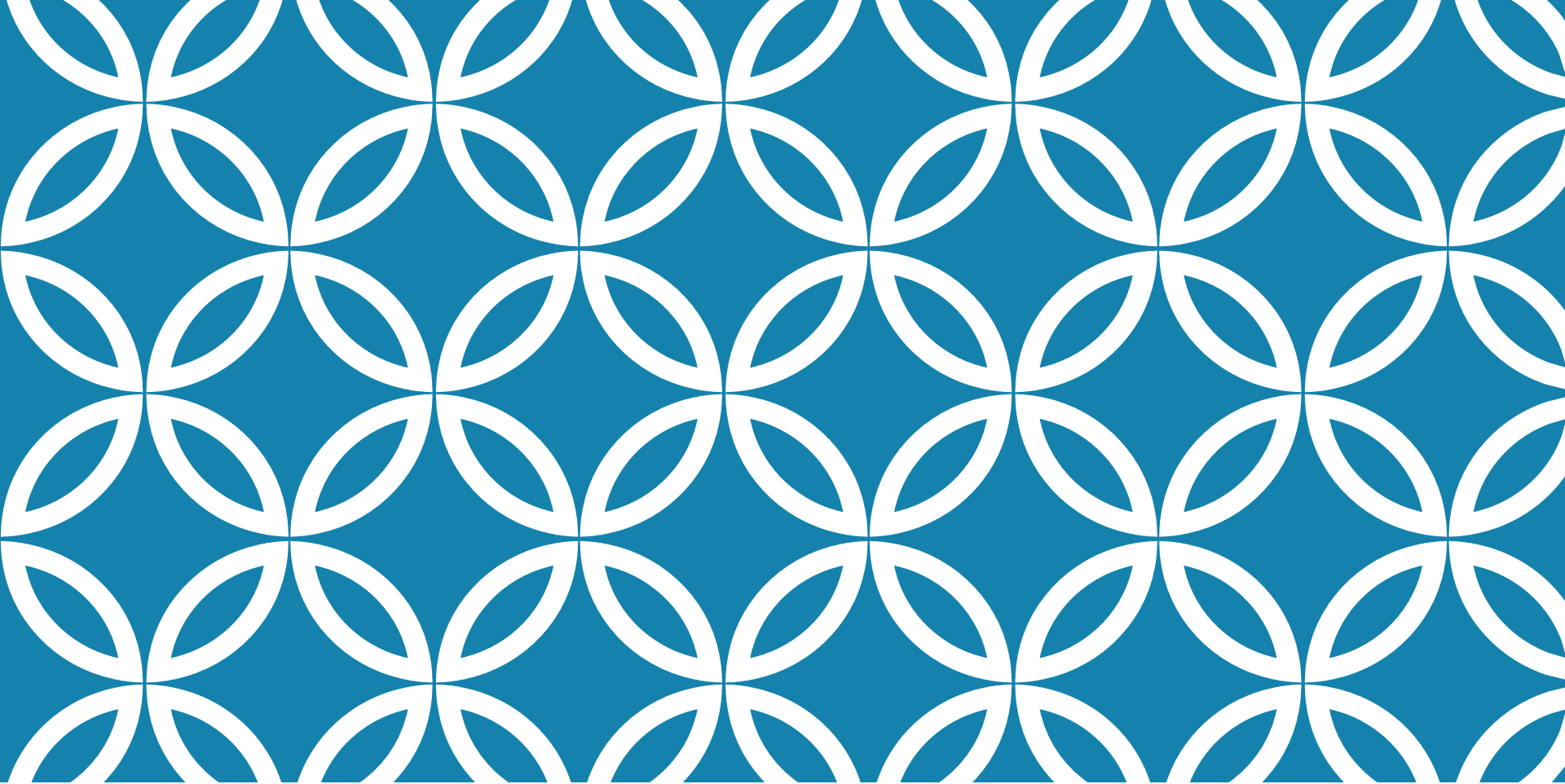
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**THANK YOU** |