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A Note from the Editor-in-Chief

Dear authors and colleagues,

We are more than happy to inform you that the issue in November 2021 of the International Journal of TESOL & Education (ijte) has completed its mission. We have so good articles from Austria, Bangladesh, and Vietnam.

From Austria and Bangladesh, we send our deepest thanks to University of Klagenfurt, Austria, and Comilla University, Bangladesh.

From Northern Vietnam, we send our thanks to those authors from (1) Hanoi National University of Education, (2) University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, (3) Thuongmai University, Hanoi, and (4) University of Economics – Technology for Industries.

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We send our big congratulations to those authors from Austria, Bangladesh, and Vietnam who contribute their professional knowledge and skills in research to the body of literature worldwide. Their contributions to literature will bring many benefits to lecturers and educators in the fields of TESOL & Education.

Last but not least, we really appreciate the hard-working of the editorial board and reviewers. Without their efforts and valuable time, the International Journal of TESOL & Education (ijte) could not achieve qualified research articles on this issue.

Thanks be to God for everything!



Associate Professor Pham Vũ Phi Ho, Ph.D.
Editor-in-chief
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Use of Self-regulated Learning Strategies in Paragraph Writing at Van Lang University

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: self-regulated learning strategies, challenges, paragraph writing

This cross-sectional study aims to find out what self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies the English-majored freshmen at Van Lang University in Vietnam exploited during the academic writing course and their challenges when using such SRL ones. 100 English-majored freshmen selected randomly from twenty Writing-2 classes in the second semester of the school year 2020-2021 made up the paper's participants. To collect the relevant data, a set of 30-item questionnaires, which are categorized into six dimensions: motive, method, time, performance, physical environment, and social environment, served as the instrument, accompanied by interviews. Descriptive analysis revealed that students used SRL strategies in their writing moderately. The findings indicated that most students had difficulties using three dimensions: time management, method, and motive in writing. Despite a number of writing challenges, students tended to take up dimensions, namely physical and social environment, to surpass their writing difficulties.

Introduction

It is strongly believed that writing skills are considered one of the most difficult ones to be mastered and hard to teach (Richard & Renandya, 2002). Undoubtedly, academic writing plays a crucial role in tertiary students' life, and it is of great importance for students to succeed in a particular discipline (Ndoricimpa & Barad, 2021; Elsegood & Rahimi, 2009; Pham & Usaha, 2009). Not surprisingly, it requires numerous aspects, namely grammatical and rhetorical devices, conceptual and judgment elements. Also, learning writing, the students need to enhance their critical reasoning skills in order to be able to express their ideas apparently (Elsegood & Rahimi, 2009). However, helping students to be more effective in writing is not an easy job for the teachers (Pham & Usaha, 2009).

Regardless of its significance as a sign of literacy in language acquisition, writing skill has not been taught much in the school-based curriculum. In spite of spending many years learning English, Vietnamese students' English ability is still far from the expectation, especially writing skills. Indeed, students' weak writing results were clearly shown through the survey of

Tuoitre Newspaper (2015). When taking the National High School Graduation Examination in the academic years of 2013-2014 and 2015-2016, the majority of the candidates had a really low score, mainly between 0 and 2.0 points out of 10.0 points. In regard to Do (2018)' findings, most of them supposed that writing a paragraph for a given topic was too difficult for them to know how to start and what to write (Do, 2018). Also, English major freshmen at Van Lang University kept complaining that the writing section was really a challenging task.

The first semester of the school year 2020-2021 witnessed students' scores in writing one course at an alarming rate. Specifically, the statistical marks showed that 53.4% of 783 students got an average mark (5 to 6), and 6% of them got a good mark (8 to 9). Noticeably, up to 25.2% of them failed the exam.

Table 1. The students' grades in writing one course

Mark	Number of students	Percentage
<5	197/783	25.2%
5	259/783	33.1%
6	159 /783	20.3%
7	121/783	15.5%
8	36/783	4.6%
9	11/783	1.4%
10	0/783	0%

From such an alert circumstance, there comes a must to find out a number of suitable methods that catch learners' special attention to their autonomy and guide them to take their own learning strategies up. Of all these strategies, self-regulated learning is generally considered as one of the best predictors of learning and personal development (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1986; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990; Purdie & Hattie, 1996).

In the light of the positive results of the previous research on using self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies in a different context, i.e., Magno (2009), Bakry and Alsamadani (2015) and Abadikhah, Aliyan and Talebi (2018), the paper was conducted to investigate into the use of SRL strategies among English major freshmen at Van Lang University as well as to explore the difficulties they faced when using the strategies in learning writing.

2. Literature review

2.1 Definition of SRL

SRL has gained popularity among a wide range of scholars and researchers, e.g., Pintrich (2000); Zimmerman (1994, 1989, 2002); Andrade and Evans (2012), Abadikhah, Aliyan & Talebi (2018), Teng (2021), etc. owing to its significance in language achievement. There are numerous ways to define SRL, according to many authors. One of the most commonly accepted definitions is from Zimmerman, who used to define SRL as when learners actively take part in their own learning process meta-cognitively, motivationally and behaviorally (Zimmerman, 1989, p.329). Pintrich later gave his more detailed definition. He referred to SRL when learners follow the process, including setting goals, monitoring, regulating and controlling their cognition, motivation, and behavior (Pintrich, 2000, p.453). In 2008, Zimmerman clarified SRL is a proactive process ranging from setting goals, setting and deploying strategies, and self-monitoring. Thus, self-regulated students have to be more active

and pay attention to their learning. Also, they know how to manage their learning in a logical way.

For the sake of the study, three phases of self-regulation suggested by Zimmerman (2000) are of avail, including the forethought phase (students utilize task analysis), the performance phase (students deploys the forethought phase and utilize self-control and self-observation) and the self-reflection phase (students self-evaluate their progress and self-adjust their achievement). Zimmerman (2000) proposed the cycle of SRL strategies in Figure 1 below:

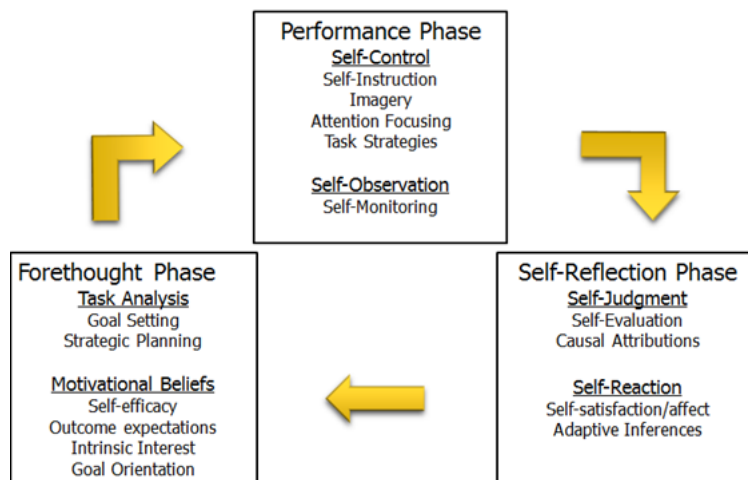


Figure 1. The cyclical self-regulation phases (Zimmerman, 2000)

2.2 Frameworks for SRL strategies

Several different self-regulated learning models have been worked out over the past two decades (Puustinen, & Pulkkinen, 2001, p.269). Accordingly, a self-regulated learning practical framework comprises six dimensions that are similar to why, how, when, with whom, where, and what. These dimensions are named motive, methods, time, social environment, physical environment, and performance, respectively (Dembo & Seli, 2012; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000). The six dimensions were summarized by Andrade & Evans (2015) presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Dimensions of SRL Strategies (Andrade & Evans, 2015)

Dimensions	Keywords	More information on the scale
Motive	Why	Learners get motivated on their own to get through challenging tasks. (Andrade & Evans, 2015, p. 118)
Method	How	Learners deploy different strategies, techniques and methods to complete the tasks. (Andrade & Evans, 2015, p. 118)
Time	When How long	Learners prioritize and split time reasonably into each task. (Andrade & Evans, 2015, p. 118)
Performance	What... accomplished What... improved	Learners self-analyze their learning progress to have better performance. (Andrade & Evans, 2015, p. 119)
Physical environment	Where	Learners are aware of getting distracted by exterior and interior factors. (Andrade & Evans, 2015, p. 119)
Social environment	With whom	Learners search for aids from a variety of resources to facilitate learning. (Andrade & Evans, 2015, p. 119)

2.3 Relationship between SRL strategies and L2 writing

The impact of SRL strategies on writing achievement has been proved by numerous studies, e.g., Goy (2017), Abadikhah, Aliyan & Talebi (2018), Teng (2021), Bai & Wang (2021).

To start with, Goy (2017) did action research to investigate the effect of strategy instruction on foreign language learners' writing skills and self-regulation abilities. The paper was conducted in three weeks with the participation of 18 students. The results demonstrated that learners found it helpful to enhance their writing skills through strategy training. Simultaneously, since learners used a small number of techniques and only their writings were improved slightly, there was a need to have further instruction and feedback.

What is more, Abadikhah, Aliyan & Talebi (2018) found out the perceptions of EFL university students towards self-regulated learning strategies in writing academic papers. The result exposed that the participants used the self-regulatory strategies and processes ranking from moderate to a slightly high degree. Moreover, the findings revealed that participants failed to appropriately employ particular writing strategies, including pre-writing, goal-setting and self-consequence, which suggested a necessity to apply additional strategies for their writing.

For the study of Teng (2021), she looked into the effects of motivational beliefs and self-efficacy on SRL strategies in EFL writing. With the participation of 389 undergraduate students, the findings indicated that the effects of motivational beliefs on SRL strategies were remarkable, while self-efficacy turned out to be a strong indicator of metacognitive, cognitive, and motivational regulation strategies. Noticeably, text processing was supposed to heavily rely on linguistic self-efficacy; meanwhile, self-regulatory efficacy influenced students' use of SRL strategies ranging from knowledge rehearsal, goal-oriented monitoring, idea planning, peer learning to interest enhancement.

In the same year (2021), Bai & Wang examined the relationships among motivational beliefs, SRL strategies use, and competence in EFL writing for the sake of 540 grade 8 students. The results revealed that the samples were slightly interested in writing with their low-level use of self-efficacy. Also, there came a conclusion that both motivation and SRL strategy use generated writing competence, which suggested a necessity of providing more strategy-based instructions to learners.

Generally, SRL strategies benefit students in many ways, such as increasing students' motivation & confidence in their personal learning, raising students' awareness of their limitations and abilities to adjust their learning, facilitating them to their goal-setting, developing students to feel like they belong to the academic program. More importantly, self-regulated learning enables even teachers to provide their students with different academic tasks.

2.4 Research Questions

This paper aims to explore which SRL strategies the English-majored freshmen deployed in their writing of two courses and their difficulties in using such strategies. To reach the purpose of the paper, the survey was designed to answer the two research questions as follow:

- a) What self-regulated learning strategies did the English-majored freshmen use in learning paragraph writing at Van Lang university?
- b) What challenges in using self-regulated learning strategies did the English-majored freshmen face?

3. Methods

3.1 Pedagogical Setting & Participants

For the purposes of the study, 100 English majored first-year students consisting of twenty-two male students and seventy-eight female ones made up the research samples. The participants were chosen randomly from twenty different Writing-2 classes at Van Lang University, Vietnam, during the second semester of 2020-2021. The majority of the students, the average age of 19, were at the pre-intermediate level of English, and they have been studying fundamental subjects pertained to English language major.

For the Writing 2 course, they studied with the compiled coursebook named writing two, whose content was selected from the two-course books Great Writing 2-Great paragraph and Effective Academic Writing 1. Its goals are to offer students abundant step-by-step writing

practice and develop final written products at the B1 level. Also, the writing course provides students with a variety of topic-based vocabulary. The course included 30 teaching periods with two credits. The average number of learners is forty students who study 3 periods a week and complete the course in 10 weeks.

Under the auspices of the course, students have availed the opportunity to study how to write a descriptive paragraph, a listing-order paragraph, a how-to paragraph and an opinion paragraph. After studying a one-hour theoretical period, students are asked to practice writing a 120-word paragraph in 45 minutes and then have peer correction before handing their handwriting out to the lecturer for corrective feedback.

3.2 Design of the Study

This case study research was carried out in a cross-sectional explanatory design; that is, the data were collected at one point in time (Creswell, 2009). Specifically, this research paper tries to find out what SRL strategies students regularly use at Van Lang University, as well as their challenges of using these SRL strategies.

3.3 Data collection & analysis

3.3.1 Questionnaires

A 30-item questionnaire with a 4 Likert scale was used for gathering the information to answer the first research question. Thirty items were categorized into six dimensions which were adapted from Andrade & Evans (2015) - time, motive, method, social environment, performance and physical environment. At the ninth teaching session of the course, one hundred and ten first-year students (110 students) in these twenty classes received a copy of the questionnaire. The questionnaires were employed as a means for the researcher to explore what SRL strategies students used at Van Lang University. A total of 100 valid questionnaires (90.9%) were returned to the researcher right after they had been finished. The students' opinions were tabulated and grouped into six dimensions and then calculated into a percentage to identify what SRL strategies students use.

3.3.2 Interview

Two open-ended questions were used to explore the challenges students faced when using SRL strategies as follow:

Question 1. *What are the challenges you deal with when you use the strategies in learning writing?*

Question 2. *What are the easiest and the most difficult sub-strategies to be used? Why?*

3.4 Data collection procedures

The questionnaires were first delivered to the participants. All of them were encouraged to complete the questionnaires in about 25 minutes. After that, ten students were randomly chosen to participate in the interview. Each student answered the interview questions in 5-7 minutes, and the researcher took notes of their responses carefully.

For presenting the results of the study, percentages of each item were calculated to describe and summarize the responses of the samples. The results of items related to each dimension were presented in tables, and explanations were provided accordingly. Together with the data from the questionnaires, responses collected from the interviews were presented.

4. Results/Findings & Discussion

4.1 Results/Findings

Research question 1: What self-regulated learning strategies did the English-majored freshmen use in learning paragraph writing at Van Lang university?

SRL strategies used by students were explored, including (1) which ones they use most and (2) which ones they used less. This could be explained through the mean score in Figure 2. The data collected from the questionnaires showed that the students deployed SRL to some extent with an unbalanced level as follow

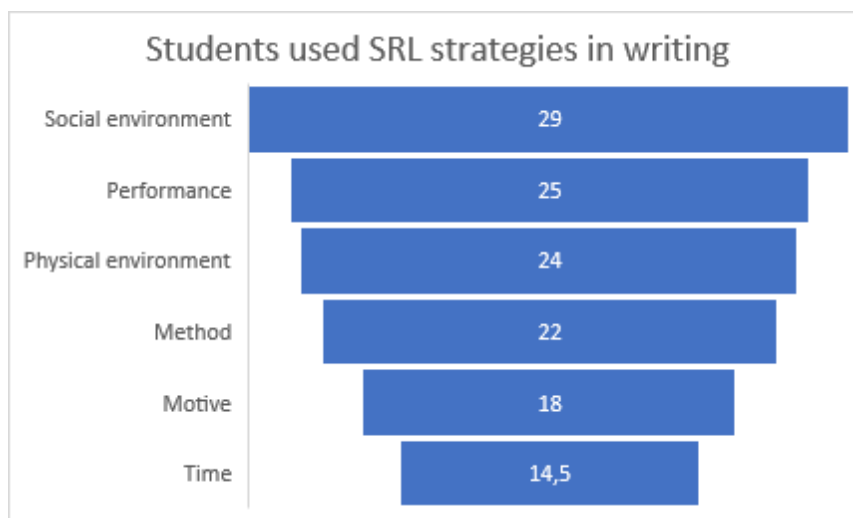


Figure 2. The SRL strategies used by the first-year English majors in learning writing

As can be shown by Figure 2, the social environment was the most frequently used strategy with the highest mean score of 29. Meanwhile, time was the least frequently used strategy, with the lowest mean score of 14.5. It revealed that most of the samples had trouble budgeting their writing time. Another strategy that had a low mean score was motive (M=18). That could explain why writing skills were considered to be the most boring to study. Lack of the main drive for learning may cause sequencing challenges in learning writing. Moreover, the mean score of the method was also low (M=22).

From the students' responses in Table 3, most of the participants heavily relied on support from others to facilitate them to writing easily. In addition, to these samples, getting feedback and grades played a key role in directing them to acknowledge, accept and turn their drawbacks into strengths. Then, the majority of samples reflected that their writing activities were somehow affected by surroundings and internal factors.

Table 3. The SRL strategies most used by the English-majored freshmen in writing

Social environment	I ask my lecturer for help when I have trouble writing.	51%	27%	18%	3%
	I search on the Internet, which helps me write better.	33%	31%	27%	9%
	I use Google translation to help me write easily.	29%	39%	29%	3%
	I actively participate in writing communities via Facebook.	21%	20%	41%	18%
	I read different sample paragraphs from reference books to help me write easily.	27%	35%	25%	13%
Performance	I use feedback from my lecturer to improve my writing skills.	48%	23%	22%	7%
	I understand how well I am doing in my English writing class through my writing marks.	41%	32%	21%	6%
	I know what I need to improve when it comes to writing tasks.	40%	31%	26%	3%
	I always monitor my progress through each writing assignment.	45%	27%	19%	9%
	I appreciate others point out my writing errors.	31%	59%	6 %	4 %
Physical environment	I can write when my classmates make noise.	58%	26%	14%	2%
	I need a place having enough brightness to write.	60%	39%	1%	0%
	I get distracted easily when I write.	35%	65%	0 %	0 %
	I have some anxiety when writing.	26%	48%	22%	4%
	I feel sleepy when writing.	27%	41%	19%	13%

Regarding students' use of SRL strategies (see Table 3), most samples took advantage of the social environment as their most frequent strategies (Mean=29). Specifically, 78% were accustomed to asking for help from teachers, friends, or other online sources to overcome the lack of writing ideas, vocabulary or even the writing outline. More than 60% of samples made use of other sources such as websites, sample paragraphs, google translation to help them write better, while the others found studying via writing communities and reference course books useful with 41% and 62%, respectively. The second frequent strategy used by students was the performance which was revealed through the findings that more than 70% of participants strongly agreed and agreed that feedback from teachers and peers as well as grades helped them make progress in their writing skills. Therefore, 71% could get through their weaknesses when they got involved in writing tasks and assignments. The third frequent strategy with mean=24 reflected how students' writing depended on the physical environment. Particularly, external factors such as noise and brightness prevented students from concentrating on writing (accounted for more than 80% of the samples). Meanwhile, internal factors also hindered 74% of students in their efforts to write and caused 68% of them to fall asleep when writing.

Table 4. The SRL strategies less used by the English-majored freshmen in writing

Dimension	Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Time	I always have adequate time to cover the writing process.	0%	3%	78%	19%
	I submit my writing paper on time or before the due time.	1%	6%	32%	61%
	I split time for each writing step.	0%	2%	21%	77%
	I use my time effectively when writing.	3%	11%	69%	17%
	I know how to prioritize writing tasks.	6%	12%	53%	29%
Motive	I have a clear goal to learn writing.	12%	19%	46%	23%
	I am highly motivated to learn writing.	5%	11%	64%	20%
	I feel comfortable when I deal with my writing tasks.	13%	18%	46%	23%
	I know clearly what I am supposed to write.	20%	24%	28%	28%
	I feel encouraged by my writing progress.	17%	24%	48%	11%
Method	I am aware of some writing techniques that improve my writing skills.	19%	29%	30%	22%
	I adapt writing techniques that fit my learning style.	15%	21%	49%	15%
	I search for writing techniques to improve my writing.	17%	28%	42%	13%
	I strictly follow the writing process step by step.	2%	14%	58%	26%
	I apply a variety of writing techniques to improve my writing.	6%	19%	53%	22%

Regarding the samples' feedback in Table 4, method (mean=22) was the strategy the participants made bad use of. Particularly, despite 48% of the students' awareness of practical writing techniques and 45% of them even sought a variety of techniques, only 16% and 25% of them could make good use of these techniques to better writing. Motive with mean=18 also was the dimension students deployed at a moderate level in their writing. Specifically, while 44% of the samples understood their writing purposes and 41% found their progress encouraging, not many students were motivated and convenient with the percentage of 18 and 31, respectively. More importantly, the use of time (mean=14.5) was shown to be used at the least level. Noticeably, although nearly 20% of students mastered how to budget time, the majority (less than 10%) failed to manage their time effectively when dealing with the writing process and the due time to hand in their written product.

Research question 2: What challenges in using self-regulated learning strategies did the English-majored freshmen face?

The interview results showed three main points. One of the most common problems the participants had to face was that when they dealt with a certain topic, they spent most of the time writing with less time for pre-writing activities, i.e., brainstorming and proofreading peer correction. They also explained that time seemed to go by quickly when they were asked to write. As a result, they failed to finish their writing without a conclusion or even no fully supporting ideas and examples. This was greatly related to time management. Another challenge was from the fear of writing. Specifically, eight of the ten participants expressed their anxiety over writing tasks and shared that it was hard for them to improve their writing abilities in a semester. Last but not least, all of the samples supposed that the social environment was the easiest sub-strategy to be used, especially the direct interaction with their classmates to exchange information and the help of technological devices to write their assignments. In terms of the most difficult sub-strategy, while six students claimed that time management is the hardest sub-strategy to be employed, three students said that it was their motive, the other thought that it was their method. In brief, the considerable challenges in applying the SRL strategies among students were method, motive, and especially time management.

4.2. Discussion

Through the data analysis, there was no balance among six dimensions in terms of rates. To be specific, while physical and social environment were in the highest rates, motive and time received much lower and lowest respectively. It could be explained that bad time management posed a series of difficulties for students. In fact, college academic writing requires more tasks full of supporting ideas, explanations and examples. As Andrade and Evans (2012) discussed, writing in a second language may take college students a long time, for they had to struggle against grammar and lexical choices.

Another dimension that was problematic to major English freshmen was motive or goal-setting. Noticeably, the significance of goal-setting used to be proved by Page-Voth and Graham's study (1999). They concluded that those who were taught goal-setting strategies outperformed those who were not in writing performance. One year earlier, in 1989, Britton and Glynn (1989) stated that there was a correlation between time management or task management and goal-setting. Specifically, according to them, poor time management resulted in not achieving specific goals, not segmenting them, and not understanding how to do their best to achieve particular objectives (as cited in Dembo, 2004). Therefore, if students did not know what they had to write, they would find it quite challenging to keep track of required tasks in due time. It, of course, was because time was not controlled suitably.

To solve this problem, Andrade and Evans (2012) suggested that the first step for teaching and learning writing is to arouse awareness of the writing process and of the need to split sufficient time into the different stages of writing (Andrade and Evans, 2012, p.14). They emphasized the nature of writing as a process that should be implemented step by step. (Weigle 2014) supplemented that SRL strategies should be introduced to students right at the beginning, and various stages of writing should be employed fully so as to create better writing.

With the help of technological devices, students felt no difficulties in making good use of them in their study, especially in writing. Indeed, social environment strategies gained popularity among students. The higher rate could explain that with a mean of 3.89. By means of technology, students looked up new words, got their ideas translated into Vietnamese, and asked for help from their friends.

Surprisingly, the participants made good use of physical environment strategies in their writing. With the highest rate, they showed that they could not be distracted much from the room facilities' outside noises. Although a few of them disagreed with the statement, "I switch off my phone to concentrate on my writing", the participants' concentration on writing tasks seemed not to be influenced much.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the study showed the reality of using SRL strategies of the first-year English majors at Van Lang University to improve their writing ability. Although the students used the strategies in learning writing, they only employed these strategies at a moderate level. This needs both lecturers and learners' great efforts to balance SRL strategies usage in teaching and studying writing effectively. Based on the findings, teachers should train their learners or give them more opportunities to improve their time management and method. Moreover, arousing learners' motivation is very crucial because it is positively related to their writing ability.

Due to the scope and nature of the study, shortcomings found from this paper are unavoidable since the findings and the implications were mainly specific to the teaching and learning of Writing two at the Faculty of Foreign Languages in Van Lang University, Vietnam. Moreover, it is such limited time and objective conditions that the statements from questionnaires and explanations are not actually sufficient. For adequate argument, the paper should have been strengthened by a larger size of samples, funds for deeper investigation, and the researcher's better design for interview questions.

For further research, it is recommended that the results be verified with other research instruments and even through an experiment to explore more reliable findings. The research itself also suggested conducting further investigations into the effectiveness of SLR strategies on students' learning outcomes.

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Biodata

Ms. Mai Thi Thanh Tran, an EFL lecturer at Van Lang University, has been teaching English for more than twelve years. As an EFL lecturer and a material writer, she has published extensively on various EFL issues both nationally and internationally. Her current professional interests include techniques and approaches in teaching, literature learning and play activities.

American English and Vietnamese Use in Public Signs: A Pragmatic Cultural Comparison and Translation

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ABSTRACT

English public signs represent the development and welcome of Vietnam to visitors around the world. However, the Vietnamese-English public sign translation currently has many drawbacks, one of which is a lack of cultural and pragmatic factors to be taken into account. In order to improve the practice, a comparison of American English and Vietnamese use in public signs has been made, applying the framework of a pragmatic set by Sharifian (2017), which supports the idea that the public signs are realizations (practs) of the pragmemes underlying the situational contexts associated with some certain speech acts that can be precisely interpreted based on some pragmatic cultural schemas such as DIRECTING, PROMPTING, and COMPELLING. With the help of the street view tool on google maps, a corpus of more than 800 English public signs (in the US) and more than 800 Vietnamese ones (in Vietnam) is created for further corpus-based, metadiscourse, and contrastive analyses. The results show that both American English and Vietnamese pragmatic cultural schemas activate the same speech acts manifested in public signs. The differences are notified in the pragmemes related to territory indication, restriction, reminding, warning, command, and prohibition; also in the formulation and enactment of the practs. Many applications to translation of public signs from Vietnamese into English are also suggested at the end of the article.

Keywords:

Public signs
Cultural schemas
Pragmatics
American English
Vietnamese
Translation

Introduction

As a result of transnational trade, tourism and globalization, English has become the most popular foreign language to be used and taught in Vietnam (Sundkvist & Nguyen, 2020; Nguyen & Ngo, 2021; Quoc et al, 2021). However, as an international language, English embodies various cultures around to be concerned, and it cannot be utilized without an in-depth insight into its own associations, identities and experiences. As Wierzbicka (1998, p.

242) said, "in different societies and different communities, people speak differently, and not just in terms of lexicon and grammar" (for example, American English is different from British English and Australian English). Therefore, English in Vietnamese contexts reflects the varieties of the world and may also have its own life that is shared with the native speakers; but before using or localizing English, the Vietnamese should identify certain distinctive norms underlying it. One of the ways to do so, according to Wierzbicka (1998), is looking into *public sign* contexts, which she considers as a salient aspect to explore the social attitudes and cultural values of a speech community.

In Vietnam, public signs in English and bilingual Vietnamese-English constitute most of the linguistic landscapes, especially those in urban areas (Phan & Starks, 2019). The presence of English along with Vietnamese in public spaces in Vietnam can be seen as a sign of development and integration like many other similar contexts in the world (such as Kang & Zhang, 2008; Vettorel, 2013; Thongtong, 2016; ALHyari & Hamdan, 2019). However, the language transfer of public signs from Vietnamese into English in Vietnam currently has many shortcomings, which are reflected quite often in the local media and reports (such as Nguyen et al., 2017; Nguyen, 2018). These reflections focus on errors of spelling, grammar and lexical meanings caused by the negative interference of the source language, while the differences in cultural and pragmatic factors that affect the language use and translation are not adequately investigated. In fact, some public signs that are translated into English, though free from errors, may seem unfamiliar to people from English-speaking countries. For example,

- (1) A Vietnamese public sign: *Chúc quý khách thương lộ bình an*
 Lexical meaning: *Wish beloved guests (get to) the upper part road peace*
 English translation: *Wish you the upper road of peace*

The sign in (1) is used as a goodbye to tourists who are leaving a place in Vietnam. The translation is reported to be strange or even confusing to visitors whose L1 is English since it is a direct transfer from Vietnamese meanings and culture without any consideration for the target counterparts, which do not encourage such use to express a farewell (instead, *have a good journey* may be preferred). Therefore, it is not only a matter of spelling, meaning and grammar, but also a matter of how the language is used from the speech community members' perception of their interactions with each other and the world.

It has been proved by many pragmaticians (such as Capone, 2010; Kecskes, 2013; Wong, 2010) that language use gives "living" to sentences, and it simultaneously is sheltered in cultural contexts. In other words, the language of a speech community has its own use, which reflects some cultural norms and values of the community itself. However, while the relationship between language use and situations has been significantly theorized, the one between pragmatic devices and cultural cognition seems to remain a research gap.

Sharifian (2017, p. 2) argues that human (culturally sensitive) experience is perceived and (re)constructed in the so-called "cultural conceptualizations," which are instantiated in

features of human language, including morphosyntax, semantic meaning, pragmatic meaning, and discourse. Sharifian (2017, pp. 11-14) also advocates that the cultural conceptualizations in relationship to language can be analyzed with *cultural schemas* which provide the structures, filling, encoding, retrieval, evaluation and anticipations of the experience or information that is "shared or assumed to be shared by the members of a speech community". According to Sharifian (2017, p. 14), for the pragmatic meanings to be concerned, cultural schemas may play as a basis of the shared knowledge underlying the practice of speech acts/events.

In short, Sharifian's theories seem to have filled the gap between culture and pragmatics by using cultural schemas as a tool to examine pragmatic devices. The approach may prove effective in studies concerning the triple relationship of language, pragmatics, and culture, which is carried out on public signs and their cultural contexts. The research questions include: (i) how is English used in public signs for specific situations and communicative purposes that are associated with certain cultural schemas inherent in the cognition of its own speech community; and (ii) how does it differ from Vietnamese in the similar contexts so that some pragmatic cultural approach to translation strategies can be taken into account?

This study aims to investigate English public signs, limited to those found in the United States (US) since American English is one of the most influential international languages. The observations are carried out in parallel with the corresponding cases in Vietnamese from the perspective of cultural linguistics and pragmatics by Sharifian (2017). The approach has been preferred in recent studies concerning the relationship between language use and culture (or cultural conceptualizations), which will be elaborated on in the following section.

Literature review

Cultural linguistics and pragmatics

Cultural linguistics (often mentioned as *ethnolinguistics*) is a recently developed discipline deriving from branches of cognitive sciences and anthropology. One of the tools that have been suggested and utilized in the theoretical and analytical frameworks of recent studies in the field is *cultural schemas*. The notion refers to a type of cognitive schema which explains the way meanings are constructed, practiced and interpreted in cultural domains. In the work *Cultural Linguistics* (2017), Sharifian highlights the roles of cultural schemas in the relationship with pragmatics. As he puts it:

Cultural schemas (and subschemas) capture beliefs, norms, rules, and expectations of behavior as well as values relating to various aspects and components of experience (p. 7) [...] that contain a significant portion of meanings encoded in human languages. In day-to-day conversation, inferences about the knowledge possessed by an interlocutor involve the assumption of shared cultural schemas. The knowledge that underlies the enactment and uptake of speech acts is part of that knowledge (p. 52).

Here is an example of a cultural schema in daily communication: when seeing an

acquaintance at the market by chance, a Vietnamese often says *Anh/Chị (cũng) đang đi chợ hả?* ‘Are you (also) shopping now?’, then both the listener and the speaker will immediately take it as an act of *greeting* because they share some common understanding of *politeness* culture (or the cultural schema of *POLITENESS*), which is associated with the act of greeting by asking each other about the actions they are performing without any expectation for the answers but a confirmation like saying yes, smiling or nodding head and asking back the same question.

Sharifian (2017) uses the term *pragmatic cultural schema* to describe the cultural schema that serves as a basis for communicating pragmatic meanings (such as meanings of speech acts). He also notes that such meanings can be interpreted from the *practs* that realize a number of *pragmemes* associated with a particular speech act (p. 54). Pragmemes are defined as “general situational prototypes of pragmatic acts that are capable of being executed in a particular situation or cluster of situations” (Mey, 2010, p. 2884), while *practs* refers to the enactments of pragmemes in the form of linguistic expressions (Kecskes, 2010; Sharifian, 2017). Sharifian (2017) argues that the pragmemes themselves have a close association with a certain (pragmatic) cultural schema, and thus they together with the speech acts and *practs* may form a hierarchical relationship, which is called *a pragmatic set* (p. 54).

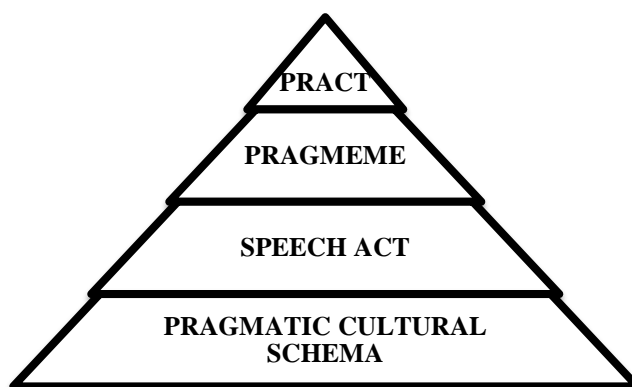


Figure 1. A pragmatic set (Sharifian, 2017, p. 54)

For example, the following pragmatic set is found in American English public signs:

- (2) Pragmatic cultural schema: DIRECTING
 Speech act: [Indicating the starting point of an area]
 Pragmeme: [WELCOMING THE COMERS]
 Practice: *Welcome to Florida; Massachusetts welcomes you*

As shown from the set, the American cultural schema of *DIRECTING* entrenched in public signs encourages indicating the starting point of an area by welcoming the visitors when they are entering the place. The rationale behind the welcome is inspired by the conceptualization that the destination is perceived as a host who is greeting the comers to the place, and this implies that the first steps into the area are already (or soon) taken and the visit has already begun.

This study aims to interpret and compare the use of American English and Vietnamese in public signs based on the framework of a pragmatic set so that English elements (assumed from the American backgrounds) can be contrasted with Vietnamese ones in the practice of public signs in Vietnam. Before the pragmatic meanings are discussed, the next section will present some brief information on public signs and their embedded pragmatic cultural schemas.

Public signs and pragmatic cultural schemas

In terms of lexicon, “sign” is defined in most dictionaries of English as a piece of paper, wood, metal or digital that has writing or a picture on it, giving information, instructions, a warning, command or direction (such as Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Oxford Learner’s Dictionary). “Biển”, the equivalent of “sign”, is similarly defined in dictionaries of Vietnamese but includes an additional attribute of “being put in places where it (the sign) is easily seen by many people” (such as Hoang, 2003).

In terms of scientific recognition, "signs" are "public notices, indications, instructions, warnings and symbols as well as any written information and pictures closely related to human lives, work as well as ecological aspects" (Dai & Lü, 2005, p. 38). This is also confirmed by Kang & Zhang (2008), who define public signs as "words and/or pictures giving information about people's lives in public places in order to inform, indicate, suggest and warn the public [...] to refine people's social behavior, human relationship, enhance manufacturing efficiency, deter the criminals, raise people's spirit, improve living conditions and help to build a harmonious society" (p. 124).

In short, *public signs* have three basic properties: (i) represented as words and/or images, (ii) put in public places, and (iii) performing informational and social functions.

The approach to public signs as images or symbols is concerned in fields of semiotics; this study mainly focuses on public signs as a part of linguistic landscape, which refers to "the use of language in its written form in the public sphere" (Gorter, 2006, p. 2). According to Landry & Bourhis (1997, p. 25), the linguistic landscape of a given territory serves the *informational function* (indicating the linguistic characteristics of a certain speech community) and the *symbolic function* (indicating the significance of a language compared with others within a bilingual or multilingual setting). These two functions of the linguistic landscape are on a general and larger scale, parallel with the informational and social functions of public signs on a more specific scale. Therefore, previous studies on public signs mostly deal with features of language as well as their applications in practical use within a speech community.

The most common functions of public signs that have been observed in prior studies are *announcing*, *explaining*, *instructing*, *displaying*, *warning*, *naming* (according to Dai & Lü, 2005), or *indicating*, *limiting*, *suggesting*, and *mandating* (Kang & Zhang, 2008; Ma, 2012). These functions can be categorized into three groups: (i) *directing* (giving information about what something is, how to do something, where to go, who is concerned, etc. so that public facilities are correctly accessed), (ii) *prompting* (providing reminders, warnings or persuasion

so that good decisions for the sake of safety can be made before action), and (iii) *compelling* (asking the public to take or not to take an action). The three categories of functions and their components are actually concepts associated with the cultural schemas of DIRECTING, PROMPTING and COMPELLING respectively which, according to Sharifian (2017, p. 52), "serve as possible sources of (assumed) shared knowledge – or common ground – that interlocutors draw upon" to practice and understand the actual language use (in public signs) appropriately.

However, as different speech communities have different systems of cultural conceptualizations, the cultural schemas may contain different meanings (such as pragmatic meanings) that are differently encoded in their languages. For example, Raddatz's report (1995) shows that the public signs in London are more polite compared to those in New York as the former often include *accounts* and *apology*, e.g. (i) "*In the interests of hygiene and amenity, the public are requested not to permit their dogs to foul the center reserve.*" (It is the pragmatic cultural schema of COMPELLING underlying a *request* with an *account*); (ii) "*We apologize for any inconvenience resulting from the temporary closure of this station yesterday. A mechanical defect on a train caused a minor fire, requiring the attendance of the fire brigade.*" (It is the pragmatic cultural schema of DIRECTING entrenched in an *announcement* with *apologies* and *reasons*); (iii) "*This stairway has 175 steps. Do not use, except in an emergency.*" (They are the pragmatic cultural schemas of PROMPTING and COMPELLING reflected in the form of *persuasion*).

Wierzbicka (1998) finds that the pragmatic cultural schema of COMPELLING in German public signs is connected to the acts of *prohibition* and *command* while that in Anglo cultures is related to the acts of *instruction* and *request*. For example, instead of using *No Parking*, *Quiet work area*, *Thank you for not smoking*, or *May use full lane* (which are familiar in Anglo cultures), German public signs tend to favor *Parking prohibited*, *Please speak quietly*, *Smoking prohibited* and *Must use the full lane*. Besides, while the pragmatic cultural schema of PROMPTING in an Anglo point of view targets the addressees' needs and interests (e.g., *Attention – change of venue for symposium*), the corresponding German public signs are usually aimed at protecting the addresser's benefits (e.g., *Attention! Private property! Entry prohibited!*).

Halonen & Laihonen (2019) study the differences between *dog signs* in Finland and Romania. The results show that dog signs in Finland tend to follow Western cultures, seeing dogs as pets or family members; thus, the signs mostly target the dogs' owners and are usually constructed as an act of *instruction* though underlying the pragmatic cultural schema of COMPELLING (e.g., *No dogs*). In contrast, *dog signs* in Romania consider dogs as fellow workers, property guardians or shepherds of livestock; the signs thus target the passers-by and are usually in the form of a *reminder* (e.g., *Beware of the dog*), a *warning* (e.g., *Beware, the dog bites; Attention! The dog is dangerous*), or a *command* (e.g., *Stop! The dog bites*) encouraged by the pragmatic cultural schema of PROMPTING.

Jing (2014, p. 2531) argues that the act of *restricting* following the pragmatic cultural schema of DIRECTING in Chinese public signs tends to list all the individuals, objects or actions that

are permitted or prioritized, e.g. *Seats reserved for seniors, children, pregnant women*, whereas this case in English-speaking countries is just an act of *indicating*, that is, *Courtesy seating*, with or without any further explanation. A similar difference is also encountered in Hu's study (2016) with the finding that the pragmatic cultural schema of COMPELLING in Chinese public signs often inspires a *request* accompanied by a *metaphor*, e.g., *The grass is smiling, please walk on the path; The grass is sleeping, please do not disturb*; while the corresponding case in English-speaking countries is usually phrased as *(Please) Keep off the grass*.

In sum, public signs – as a part of the linguistic landscape – serve many informational-social functions that can be correctly analyzed with the relevant linguistic evidence so that some familiar cultural norms will be identified and noted for cross-cultural understanding and translation.

Methods

The data

This is qualitative research on public signs as a written language (with or without accompanying images) observed in public places, serving the functions of *directing*, *prompting* and *compelling*. The languages of the public signs are limited to American English and Vietnamese. With the help of the *street view* tool on google maps, more than 800 English public signs (randomly collected in different states of the US) and more than 800 Vietnamese ones (randomly collected in Ho Chi Minh City and many other provinces of Vietnam) are observed (for inductive reasoning) and checked (for deductive reasoning). Other samples are also received from the author's colleagues and friends around or taken from previous studies, shared pictures on the Internet or companies producing public signs in the US and Vietnam. The time range for the observation is between August 2018 and May 2021.

Corpus-based analysis

The database is first categorized into groups of functions, then similar structures or keywords with a view to detecting some characteristics concerning their formulations, contexts, frequency, and cultural conceptualizations. For example, the items that are used to sort out the English data include *stop, end, begin, welcome, here, no, do not, prohibit, notice, warning, caution, danger, please, must*, etc. The results are lists of linguistic expressions that may reveal the patterns of their semantic structures, pragmatic meanings, collocations, prevalence, and underlying cultural norms.

Meta-discourse analysis

The data is assessed with an order or a mix of the following operations, i.e., identifying linguistic markers that highlight pragmatic meanings (meta-discourse analysis stage); recognizing the scenarios that may be a basis for the evaluation of pragmatic meanings (discourse analysis stage), and examining the relationship between perception and assessment of pragmatic meanings with relevant cultural conceptualizations and cultural evidence

(conceptual analysis stage). The method is suggested by Sharifian & Tayebi (2017) and proves useful for the current research purposes as the three analysis stages are interconnected while the levels of meta-discourse and discourse are all related to cultural conceptualizations entrenched in the language.

Contrastive analysis

The use of American English and Vietnamese in public signs are described and compared with the framework of a pragmatic set by Sharifian (2017) concerning the relationship among pragmatic cultural schemas (DIRECTING, PROMPTING, COMPELLING), speech acts, pragmemes, and practs (Figure 1). Some comments are also made on the formulation and enactment of the practs in association with some cultural conceptualizations. The method will result in a list of L2 features paralleled with those of the L1 to constitute the problem areas (i.e., differences) that need focal attention while the similar areas are taken as assistance in the language acquisition and practice (Lado, 1957; Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Findings

The pragmatic cultural schema of DIRECTING

The pragmatic cultural schema of DIRECTING encoded in (American) English and Vietnamese public signs is associated with the speech acts/events of: presenting the tagged objects; indicating the starting point of a territory; indicating the ending point of a territory; offering assistance; announcing the inconvenience; giving directions to a place, and restricting. Some similarities and (marked) differences in the typical general situations (pragmemes) of the speech acts/events and their realizations in words (practs) can be discussed as follows.

Table 1. Analysis of speech act/event 1: [presenting the tagged object]

Pragmemes	English practs (in the US)	Vietnamese practs
1.1. NAMING	<i>Waiting room; Exit</i>	<i>Phòng chờ; Lối ra</i>
1.2. DESCRIBING THE STATUS	<i>Sold out; Reserved</i>	<i>Hết + OBJECT; OBJECT + đã đặt</i>
1.3. MENTIONING THE USAGE	<i>Push-button-to-open; Push</i>	<i>Ấn-nút-để-mở; Đẩy ra</i>
1.4. MENTIONING THE TAGGED OBJECT AS A PLACE TO GET SOMETHING (DONE)	<i>The dirt stops here Train stops here The muck stops here</i>	<i>Đế-giày dép-ở đây (‘Put-shoes-here’) Ở đây-có bán-gạo (‘Here-is sold-rice’)</i>

Besides the similarities in naming the tagged objects (1.1) and mentioning their usage (1.3), the difference observed from Table 1 is that English public signs usually describe the status of the tagged object without mentioning the object itself, whereas Vietnamese public signs must perform this with reference to the object (e.g., *Hết-vé* ‘sold out tickets; *Bàn-đã đặt* ‘Table-reserved’) (1.2). Also, when mentioning the tagged object as a place to get something or have something done, English public signs are phrased as ‘*SOMETHING + stops here*’ and target the addressees’ needs or interests, while in Vietnamese public signs, *ở đây* ‘here’ occurs at the end of the phrase (i.e. ‘*DO SOMETHING + ở đây*’) in case of targeting the addressees’, or in the beginning (i.e. ‘*Ở đây + DO SOMETHING*’) to emphasize the addressers’ as advertising (1.4).

Table 2. Analysis of speech act/event 2: [Indicating the starting point of a territory]

Pragmemes	English practs (in the US)	Vietnamese practs
2.1. WELCOMING THE COMERS	<i>Welcome to Florida</i> <i>Massachusetts welcomes you</i>	. <i>Thành phố-Hồ Chí Minh-kính chào-quý khách</i> ('City-HoChiMinh-welcomes-you')
2.2. INDICATING THE TAGGED OBJECT AS THE STARTING POINT	<i>Student drop-off and pick-up begins here</i> <i>Maximum 50 km/h begins</i> <i>Begin one way</i> <i>Begin right turn lane</i>	<i>Đường cao tốc-TPHCM – Trung Lương-Lối vào</i> ('Highway-HCMC-Trung Luong-Entrance') <i>Lối vào-siêu thị</i> ('Entrance-supermarket')
2.3. MENTIONING THE DESTINATION WITH THE ZERO DISTANCE	<i>Florida scenic highway, mile 0</i>	<i>Hà Giang 0 km</i> <i>Tràng Vĩ 0 km</i>

As can be seen from Table 2, both English and Vietnamese public signs indicate the starting point of territory by welcoming the comers with the structure '*DESTINATION + welcomes you*' (2.1); however, the corresponding of '*Welcome to + DESTINATION*,' which is very common in English public signs, appears quite rare in Vietnamese ones except in speaking and spoken writing (2.1) due to a limited space allowed for wording on a public sign. Another significant difference that should be discussed here is that English public signs indicate the tagged object as the physical starting point of an area with the linguistic marker *begin* as in '*ZONE + begins (here)*' or '*Begin + ZONE*', while Vietnamese public signs perform this with the linguistic marker *lối vào* 'entrance' as in '*ZONE-entrance*' or '*Entrance-ZONE*' (2.2), not to mention that the zone in Vietnamese public signs is mainly highways, whereas this in the counterparts can be of various kinds such as school zone, lane zone, construction zone, quiet zone, speed zone, etc. Also, Vietnamese public signs usually show the starting point of an area by mentioning the zero distance to the destination (i.e. '*DESTINATION + 0 km*'), while this situation is not very often in English ones (found in the US) except some special routes (like the famous Florida scenic highway) (2.3).

Table 3. Analysis of speech act/event 3: [Indicating the ending point of a territory]

Pragmemes	English practs (in the US)	Vietnamese practs
3.1. SAYING THANKS (AND EXPECTING THE LEAVERS TO COME BACK)	<i>Thank you for shopping with us</i> <i>Oregon thanks you, come back soon</i>	<i>Coop.Mart-cám ơn -quý khách</i> (‘CoopMart-thanks-you’) .
3.2. ANNOUNCING THE DEPARTURE (AND EXPECTING THE LEAVERS TO COME BACK)	<i>You are now leaving California</i> <i>Leaving KANSAS. Come again</i>	.
3.3. (SAYING GOODBYE AND) EXPECTING TO SEE THE LEAVERS AGAIN	.	<i>Đồng Văn-tạm biệt-quý khách,</i> <i>hẹn-gặp-lại</i> (‘DongVan-goodbye-to you, want-to see-again’)
3.4. WISHING THE LEAVERS SAFETY ON THE ROAD	<i>Drive carefully, come back soon.</i>	<i>Thành phố-Thanh Hóa-chúc-quý khách-thượng lộ-bình an</i> (‘City-ThanhHoa-wish-you-on road-safety’)
3.5. INDICATING THE TAGGED OBJECT AS THE ENDING POINT	<i>Public beach ends here</i> <i>Quiet lane ends</i> <i>End school zone</i>	<i>Cao tốc - Hà Nội – Hải Phòng</i> <i>-kết thúc</i> (‘Highway- Hanoi-Haiphong-End/Exit’)

Table 3 presents some typical situations in which the public signs indicate the ending point of territory. There are many differences in the pragmemes and practs observed between English and Vietnamese items. Specifically, both express thanks for indicating the exit point but Vietnamese ones hardly accompany an expectation to see the guests again like their English counterparts (3.1), except for speaking or other writing contexts where the wording is not limited to the number of words or the allocated space as it is on public signs (3.1). Next, while the English public signs usually indicate the ending point in the form of a departure announcement with the structure ‘(You are) (Now) + Leaving + THE PLACE’ (3.2), the Vietnamese counterparts prefer to express ‘THE PLACE + loves to see you again (3.3) or ‘THE PLACE + wishes you safety on the road’ (3.4). *Have a good/safe journey* and *drive carefully* might also be used in English ones to realize the pragmeme (3.4) but not very often as the former is preferred in speaking and the latter is only possible when it goes with the pragmeme EXPECTING TO SEE THE LEAVER AGAIN (e.g., *come back soon, come again, see you soon*) or it is rather a road reminder/request as in *Drive carefully, we love our children*, not to mention that the pragmeme itself is rarely used alone on signs to indicate a farewell as well as an ending point but usually appear with other pragmemes (such as 3.1; 3.2; 3.4) to perform the function. Last but not least, English public signs themselves can be a physical ending signal with the wording structure ‘ZONE + ends (here)’ or ‘End + ZONE’ used in various specific kinds of zones (such as school zone, lane zone, etc.), while Vietnamese counterparts, though in the similar wording and semantic structure, are only used for highway zones (3.5) as for the other kinds, mostly symbolic images are used with a big cross on to indicate “ending” and without it to indicate “beginning”.

Table 4. Analysis of speech act/event 4: [Offering assistance]

Pragmemes	English practs (in the US)	Vietnamese practs
4.1. MENTIONING THE ADDRESSEES' INTERESTS AND SUGGESTING SOLUTIONS	<i>For questions or to report an incident, please call 410-436-3320</i>	
4.2. MENTIONING THE ADDRESSEES' PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTING SOLUTIONS	.	<i>Khi-gặp-sự cố-về-Internet, Hãy-gọi ngay: 18008119</i> (‘When-having-problems-with-Internet-please-call:18008119’)
4.3. SHOWING WILLINGNESS TO HELP AND SUGGESTING WAYS TO GET HELPED	<i>Do you need help?</i> <i>We can help</i> <i>Please call 540-344-8060</i> <i>Your safety is important to us.</i> <i>If you need to get up, use the call button for assistance.</i>	<i>Tổng đài-chăm sóc-khách hàng: 1800 1600. Chúng tôi-luôn-lắng nghe-và-trân trọng-ý kiến-của-khách hàng.</i> (‘Phone service-caring-customers: 1800 1600. We-always-listen-and-respect-opinions-of-customers’)

As shown from Table 4, English public signs are likely to offer assistance in cases of addressees wanting to know more about or do something (4.1), while Vietnamese ones tend to suggest solutions in cases of addressees having troubles (4.2). However, both English and Vietnamese public signs prefer to provide help with expressions of willingness (4.3).

Table 5. Analysis of speech act/event 5: [Announcing the inconveniences]

Pragmemes	English practs (in the US)	Vietnamese practs
5.1. EXPRESSING APOLOGY WITH A REASON	<i>We apologize for any inconvenience caused by the building construction</i> <i>We are temporarily closed, sorry for the inconvenience</i>	<i>Công trình-đang-thi công, chúng tôi-thành thật-xin lỗi-đã-làm cản trở-quý vị!</i> (‘Building-under-construction, we-really-apologize-for-obstructing-you!’)
5.2. ASKING FOR EMPATHY WITH A REASON	<i>Please excuse our appearance while we're under construction</i> <i>Please excuse our appearance. We are remodeling</i>	<i>Công trường-đang - thi công, xin lỗi-đã-làm phiền, mong-quý vị-thông cảm.</i> (‘Building-under-construction, sorry-for-bothering, hope-you-empathize’)

As shown from Table 5, there is no significant difference in the situations and their instantiations between English and Vietnamese public signs when they mean to announce the current inconveniences. The only difference that might be observed is that Vietnamese public signs usually take up asking for empathy right after the apologies, while in English public signs, apologizing and asking for empathy are not usually performed in the same situation.

Table 6. Analysis of speech act/event 6: [Giving moving directions]

Pragmemes	English practs (in the US)	Vietnamese practs
6.1. GUIDING THE ADDRESSEES ACCORDING TO THEIR INTERESTS	<i>South keep right West - left lane, East - right lane</i>	<i>TARGET + (mời đi lối này 'please go this way) + DIRECTION ARROW</i>
6.2. SHOWING THE WAY TO MOVE ON	<i>Enter here Sidewalk closed, Cross here/Use alternative route</i>	<i>TARGET/REASON + (mời đi lối này 'please go this way) + DIRECTION ARROW</i>

Table 6 shows the differences in the practs of English and Vietnamese public signs when they mean to give addressees moving directions. Specifically, the English items tend to be phrased as ‘TARGET-DIRECTION’ (6.1) or ‘MOVE + here’ (6.2), while the Vietnamese items mostly use arrow symbols to show the directions to the targets (e.g., Figure 2 and 3).



Figure 2. [Emergency Entrance]



Figure 3. [Pathway for staff only, please go this way]

Table 7. Analysis of speech act/event 7: [Restricting]

Pragmemes	English practs (in the US)	Vietnamese practs
7.1. ANNOUNCING THE AFFAIR WITHIN A LIMITED TIME PERIOD	<i>Buses may use shoulder 2pm-8pm, Mon-Fri</i>	<i>Khám-chữa-bệnh-vào-sáng-chủ nhật, 7h - 12h</i> (‘Check-care-sickness-on-morning-Sunday, 7am – 12am’)
7.2. ANNOUNCING THE ONLY OBJECTS ALLOWED	<i>Local traffic only Disabled badge holders only Reserved for church employees</i>	<i>Ghế-ưu tiên: Người già, Người bị thương, Phụ nữ có thai, Và trẻ nhỏ</i> (‘Seats-priority: Seniors, The injured, Pregnant women, And children’)
7.3. ANNOUNCING THE OBJECTS NOT ALLOWED AND EXCEPTIONS	<i>No trucks except local deliveries</i>	(SYMBOLIC IMAGE: No cars) + <i>Xe buýt- được- phép- hoạt động</i> (‘Bus-is-allowed-to run’)
7.4. ANNOUNCING THE OBJECTS WITH LIMITED SCALES	<i>Speed limit 40 2 hour parking</i>	(SYMBOLIC IMAGE) <i>Khu vực-dừng xe-không-quá-3-phút</i> (‘Area-parking-no-exceeding-3-minutes’)
7.5. ANNOUNCING THE OBJECTS NOT PERMITTED FOR EXCEEDING THE ALLOWED MAXIMUM POINT	<i>Trucks over 2 tons excluded Trucks over 4 tons prohibited</i>	(SYMBOLIC IMAGE) <i>Cấm-xe tải-có-khối lượng-trên-1T</i> (‘Prohibit-trucks-having-weight-over-1-ton’)
7.6. NAMING THE TAGGED OBJECT WITH THE ONLY BENEFACTIVES ALLOWED	<i>Bike lane/ route/ path Staffroom</i>	<i>Nhà vệ sinh-Nam/ nữ</i> (‘Restroom-male/ female’) <i>Phòng-giáo viên</i> (‘Room-teacher’)

Table 7 presents some similarities and (marked) differences of English and Vietnamese public signs in providing some kinds of restrictive information. The similarities are that both English and Vietnamese items mean to restrict the access by showing the time range in which a specific affair can be handled (7.1), showing the permitted scales of the objects (7.4), prohibiting the objects exceeding the allowed scales (7.5) or limiting the people or things that are entitled to benefit from the object (7.6). The differences are that English public signs can express the access restriction with the structure '*BENEFACTIVES + only*' or '*Reserved for + BENEFACTIVES*', while Vietnamese counterparts express this with a list of eligible benefactives (7.2); in case of just one allowed, the only entitled person is mentioned alone on the sign (e.g., *Principal* means 'principal only'); and while English public signs frequently use words to convey some limit to the objects or their scales, the Vietnamese counterparts usually use symbolic images (7.3; 7.4; & 7.5) (e.g., Figure 4 and 5).



Figure 4. [(No cars) Bus is allowed to run]



Figure 5. [Speed limit 40]

The pragmatic cultural schema of PROMPTING

Reminding and *warning* might be the most common speech acts that are associated with the pragmatic cultural schema of PROMPTING encoded in both (American) English and Vietnamese public signs. Here are the analyses in which some differences in the pragmemes and practs are detected.

Table 8. Analysis of speech act/event 8: [Reminding]

Pragmemes	English practs (in the US)	Vietnamese practs
8.1. ANNOUNCING THE INACCESSIBLE OBJECTS	<i>Exterior restoration</i> <i>Waterproofing</i> <i>Interior renovation</i>	<i>Chú ý: Máy-đang-bảo trì, sửa chữa</i> (‘Notice: Machine-under-maintenance, repair’)
8.2. ANNOUNCING THE DISADVANTAGEOUS OBJECTS	<i>Dead-end</i> <i>Road narrow</i> <i>Gusty winds; Fog area;</i> <i>Icy</i>	(<i>SYMBOLIC IMAGE</i>) (<i>SYMBOLIC IMAGE</i>) .
8.3. ANNOUNCING THE UPCOMING OBSTACLES	<i>Red signal ahead</i> <i>Work zone ahead</i>	(<i>SYMBOLIC IMAGE</i>) <i>Phía trước-100M-Công trường</i> (‘Ahead-100m-Work zone’)
8.4. ANNOUNCING THE CONTINGENCIES	<i>School bus crossing</i> <i>Watch children</i> <i>Turtle May-August</i> . .	(<i>SYMBOLIC IMAGE</i>) (<i>SYMBOLIC IMAGE</i>) . <i>Đề phòng- kẻ gian móc túi</i> (‘Watch out for-pickpockets’) <i>Coi chừng-mất xe</i> (‘Watch out for-motorbike thieves’)
8.5. ANNOUNCING THE SUPERVISION	<i>Attention: parking lot under video surveillance</i> <i>Stay in lane, speed checked by radar</i>	<i>Khu vực-có-gắn-camera-an ninh</i> (‘Area-having-attached-camera-security’) <i>Đoạn đường-thường xuyên- bắn-tốc độ</i> (‘Road-usually-check-speed’)

It is quite clear from Table 8 that there are similarities in the situations where the speech act *reminding* is executed. In specific, both English and Vietnamese public signs refer to the inaccessible or supervised status of the objects (8.1 & 8.5) so that addressees may consider adjusting their plans or behaviors to fulfill their needs or interests related to the public places. On the other hand, the differences observed are that while English public signs favor wordings in mentioning some disadvantageous objects (8.2), upcoming obstacles (8.3) or contingencies (8.4) that might need more attention, the corresponding ones in Vietnam mostly utilize symbolic images (Figure 6, 7, 8 & 9) except for the situations of construction, in which words are often used with or without the attached images (8.3). Also, the objects mentioned in the signs are significantly different between the two cultures. For example, the disadvantageous objects on the road in English signs are often associated with weather problems while these are almost absent in Vietnamese ones; and while the former alert drivers to the possibility of crossing turtles, seals, deer or blind pedestrians, such contingencies are rare in the latter, which often mention cattle, children, crowded areas, pickpockets and motorbike/bike thieves (8.4).



Figure 6.
[Dead end]



Figure 7.
[Road narrow on left]



Figure 8.
[Traffic signal ahead]



Figure 9.
[Watch children]

Table 9. Analysis of speech act/event 9: [Warning]

Pragmemes	English practs (in the US)	Vietnamese practs
9.1. MENTIONING THE OFFENSE AND THE PUNISHMENT	<i>Unpaid toll, subject to registration suspension Private property: no trespassing, violators will be prosecuted</i>	<i>Chạy-xe-quá-tốc độ-có thể-bị-phạt-tới-12-triệu-đồng</i> (‘Driving-cars-over-speed-can-be-fined-up to-12-milion-dong’)
9.2. ANNOUNCING THE DANGER	<i>Danger: Men working above Caution: Fall and Trip hazards Warning: Electrical hazard</i>	<i>Cẩn thận chó dữ</i> (‘Watch angry dogs’); <i>Cảnh báo: khu vực nước sâu nguy hiểm, đề phòng đuối nước</i> (Caution: deep water area, beware of drowning’)
9.3. MENTIONING ACCIDENT RECORDS	<i>128 persons have drowned in this lake Drive carefully, in memory of Anthony Tony Potter</i>	<i>Đoạn đường-hay-xảy-ra-tai nạn-giao thông</i> (‘On this road-often-occur-accident-traffic’)

As can be seen from Table 9, there are many similarities in the situations as well as their practical language use through which the speech act *warning* is performed in both English and Vietnamese public signs. The differences which can be identified may lie in the contexts of each situation. For example, while punishment is likely to be mentioned in English public signs for various kinds of offense (such as *unpaid toll, engine brake, unauthorized parking, dumping, littering, not stop for crossing*, etc.), it seems limited and very often to the cases of *driving over speed or drunk, dumping and smoking* in Vietnamese counterparts (9.1), not to mention that the punishment itself varies between the two cultures, i.e. usually *registration suspension, tow-away, fine, the prosecution* in English items but just *paying fine and registration suspension* are attached in Vietnamese ones. Besides, while English public signs usually use words in any cases of danger (9.2) (with or without accompanying images), the corresponding Vietnamese items tend to utilize mostly symbolic images except for cases relating to *electricity, construction, guard dogs, and deep water area*, in which words will be included. Last but not least, the context to mention an accident record in Vietnamese public signs is mainly related to traffic while that in the English counterparts might be any (9.3), for example, a sign in a lab writes, “*Carol never wore her safety goggles, now she doesn’t need them* (with the picture of the blind girl)” (Piqueen, 2018) to warn against neglecting the safety stuff when performing laboratory experiments.

The pragmatic cultural schema of COMPELLING

The pragmatic cultural schema of COMPELLING entrenched in (American) English and Vietnamese public signs encourages two typical speech acts/events, i.e., *asking addressees to take any action* and *asking addressees not to take any action*. Here are some discussions on their pragmemes and practs.

Table 10. Analysis of speech act/event 10: [Asking addressees to take an action]

Pragmemes	English practs (in the US)	Vietnamese practs
10.1. REQUESTING ADDRESSEES TO DO SOMETHING	<i>Please keep off the grass</i> <i>Please be courteous, take your personal call to the building lobby or outside</i>	<i>Vui lòng-tắt-máy-dẫn bộ</i> (‘Please-turn off-motorbike-to walk it’); <i>Vui lòng-giữ-trật tự</i> (‘Please-keep-silence’)
10.2. COMMANDING ADDRESSEES TO DO SOMETHING	<i>All traffic must turn right</i> <i>Stop here on red</i> <i>High voltage, keep out!</i>	<i>Yêu cầu-đeo-dây đai-an toàn</i> (‘Must-wear-belt-safety’) <i>Dừng lại</i> (‘Stop’)

As shown in Table 10, there is no significant difference in the typical ask addressees to do something between English and Vietnamese public signs. For the more polite cases, the structure ‘*Please + DO*’ in English and its corresponding ‘*Vui lòng + DO*’ in Vietnamese are usually taken (10.1). For the more serious cases (such as danger or emergency), the actions can be required with a command (10.2).

Table 11. Analysis of speech act/event 11: [Asking addressees not to take any action]

Pragmemes	English practs (in the US)	Vietnamese practs
11.1. ANNOUNCING THE ABSENCE OF THE ACTION	<i>No parking anytime</i> <i>No smoking in this area</i>	<i>Khu vực-không-đậu xe</i> (‘Area-no-parking’)
11.2. ANNOUNCING THE ABSENCE OF THE OBJECT RELATED TO THE ACTION	<i>No trucks or buses</i> <i>No videos or photos allowed</i>	<i>Trường học-không-khói thuốc</i> (‘School-no-cigarette-smoke’)
11.3. SAYING THANKS FOR NOT TAKING THE ACTION	<i>Thank you for not smoking</i> <i>Thank you for not littering</i>	<i>Cám ơn-bạn-không-hút thuốc</i> (‘Thank-you-not-smoking’)
11.4. REQUESTING ADDRESSEES NOT TO DO SOMETHING	<i>Please do not drive or park on grass; Please do not block the driveway. Thank you</i>	<i>Xin-đừng-mang-túi-nylon-vào-rừng</i> (‘Please-do not-bring-bags-plastic-into-jungles’)
11.5. COMMANDING ADDRESSEES NOT TO DO SOMETHING	<i>Do not enter</i> <i>Do not block intersection</i> <i>Do not stand here</i>	<i>Không-kinh doanh, để xe-lấn chiếm-lòng-lê-đường</i> (‘Do not-sell, park-invading-main road-pavement-road’)
11.6. PROHIBITING	<i>Discharge of firearms prohibited</i> <i>Recording, Photographing strictly prohibited</i>	<i>Cấm-xả rác</i> (‘Prohibit-littering’) <i>Cấm-đậu xe</i> (‘Prohibit-parking’)
11.7. PROHIBITING WITH LEGAL REFERENCES	<i>Loitering for the purpose of PANDHANDLING is prohibited by city code section 038/68B3</i> <i>Littering prohibited, State Law</i>	<i>Cấm-hút thuốc-khu vực-trong-nhà, Luật-phòng chống-tác hại -của-thuốc lá</i> (‘Prohibit-smoking-areas-inside-building, Laws- preventing-effects-of-cigarettes’)

As can be seen from Table 11, both English and Vietnamese public signs share the sense of desiring addressees not to do something when they inform them of the cases without such an action (11.1) or any object related to it (11.2). However, these situations of the speech act seem more often in English than in Vietnamese. A similar comment might be given on the case of expressing thanks to the addressees for the action they do not perform to imply that it is preferred they should not do it (11.3). According to Wierzbicka (1998), the structure ‘*No X*’ and ‘*No X-ing*’ in English public signs “imply rules rather than a prohibition” (p. 250) while ‘*Thank you for not X-ing*’ is a mere “personal message” suggesting that the addresser wants something, not that the addressees “can’t do something because of this” (p. 251). The above-mentioned cases, therefore, appear so implicit and friendly that they are favored in a large number of contexts in English public signs. For Vietnamese counterparts, such pragmemes might have been *imported* as a result of the profound language contact with English for a long time and are becoming a trend though still limited to a certain extent.

The similarities can also be observed in cases of requesting (11.4), commanding (11.5) and prohibiting (11.6 & 11.7). However, one significant difference here is that the command and the prohibition in Vietnamese public signs appear on a more regular basis compared to their English counterparts (11.6). Also, the prohibition can be encountered very often in Vietnamese public signs with or without the references to law or legal authority, while the same case in English ones tends to include the legal sources (11.7). The explanation for this might be that commanding and prohibiting acts are closely associated with the Vietnamese pragmatic cultural schema of COMPELLING, which encourages one to tell others not to do things that are dangerous or against laws or ethics, sometimes for the sake of their own benefits. In English, the schema only inspires a command or a prohibition in cases of danger, anti-social behaviors or granted authority; otherwise, the acts may seem odd (Wierzbicka, 1998, p. 250).

Discussion

Cultural conceptualizations in public signs and a glance at some other speech communities

The article has conducted a contrastive analysis of American English and Vietnamese public signs in which the pragmatic cultural schemas of DIRECTING, PROMPTING and COMPELLING are entrenched as “pools of knowledge to understand the enactment and uptake of speech acts” (Sharifian, 2017, p. 52). The results show that the schemas in both languages activate the same speech acts manifested in public signs; the differences lie in the following aspects concerning their pragmemes and practs, which can be explained with the cultural conceptualizations encoded in the language of each community.

First, to indicate the ending point of territory, American English public signs usually announce a departure (e.g., *You are now leaving X*), while Vietnamese ones usually say goodbye and wish the leavers safety on the road. The rationale is that the PROGRESSIVE PRESENCE IS PERCEIVED AS A FUTURE FACT in standard English (Leech, 2004, p. 61), which is supposed to be “irregular occurrence” or “distinguished prediction” (Calver, 1946, p. 325), and is mostly

equivalent to what can be inferred from the inversion form of the simple presence (Bolinger, 1947, p. 434), i.e., *You are now leaving X* is understood as ‘you will actually leave X’ or ‘Away X you go!’, which indicates not only the certain upcoming information but also the “sadness” mood of the place as a human being that witnesses the visitors leaving. Although such conceptualizations are shared in almost all English communities, the pragmeme of ANNOUNCING THE DEPARTURE characterizes the signs of border-ending indication in the US, but not those in the UK and Australia, which prefer SAYING THANKS (e.g., *Thank you for visiting X*). The pregame is also absent in Vietnamese public signs, which rather relate the activities of driving or walking on the road to the “farewell” concept (e.g., *Chúc quý khách thượng lộ bình an* ‘wish you to drive on the road safely’).

Second, the tagged objects in American English public signs are more active in “keeping” and “handling” things (*X stops here*) as well as representing the boundaries (*X begins here; X ends here; Begin/End X*), while those in Vietnamese counterparts play as places (*Here exists X; Do X here*) or names (*X-entrance/exit*) rather than actors. The cultural conceptualization underlying this is that THE PRESENT PLACE (‘HERE’) IS MORE CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH THINGS/EVENTS in American English than in Vietnamese public signs. More evidence for this can be found in the use of ‘*X stops here*’ as a fixed construction originating from the famous expression in the US ‘*the buck stops here*, which means the responsibility (‘the buck’) will be taken in this place without being passed to anyone or anywhere else. Therefore, the structure ‘*X stops here*’ is impossible without ‘here’ as a place where things and events will occur or be handled, while the equivalent of ‘here’ in Vietnamese public signs is an optional element that is used according to the addressers’ intentions (see Table 1, pragmeme 1.4). Besides, the current place of public signs (‘here’ or the tagged object itself) is more often perceived as a boundary indicator (especially the starting point) in the US than in the UK and Australia, but not in Vietnam, where the boundaries are recognized with the tagged names as ‘entrance’ or ‘exit’, and also very limited to the highway contexts.

Third, command and prohibition are sensitive in American English public signs (as well as those of Anglo cultures) since they are mostly taken in cases of danger or granted authority, while the corresponding cases in Vietnamese items are encouraged to a large extent as a common way to prevent behaviors against the law, ethics, safety and one’s wishes. The findings have contributed significantly to the understanding of COMPELLING schema in various speech communities. For example, the cultural conceptualization underlying the act of asking one to take or not to take an action in British English public signs is that EVERYTHING IS REQUESTED FOR OBVIOUS REASONS (e.g. *In the interests of Y/ For Y, the public are requested to/not to X*, Raddatz, 1995); in Chinese public signs, the act is performed based on the cultural conceptualization that THINGS ARE LIVING AND DESERVE MUTUAL RESPECT (e.g. *Y is smiling/sleeping, please X*, Hu, 2016); in German public signs, THE ACTIONS REQUIRED ARE INCLUDED IN REGULATIONS (e.g. *X is allowed/prohibited/not permitted; one must/must not X*, Wierzbicka, 1998); in American English public signs, the act is taken with the belief that THINGS ARE REQUIRED AS RULES OR PERSONAL EXPECTATIONS RATHER THAN PROHIBITION (e.g.

No X-ing; Thank you for not X-ing; Please X, Wierzbicka, 1998); and in Vietnamese public signs, the act can be carried out as a request (e.g. *Please X*), a command (e.g. *Do not X*), or a prohibition (e.g. *Prohibit X*) in various contexts without much restriction, usually depending on the relationship between the addressers and the addressees, for the purpose of TELLING ONE TO FOLLOW THE LAWS, THE SAFETY RULES, THE SHARED ETHICS AND THE OTHERS' EXPECTATIONS.

Last but not least, such contents as weather matters, crossing blind pedestrians, wild animals, car tow, and prosecution are common in reminders and warnings of American English public signs (and also of British English and Australian English) but almost absent in Vietnamese ones which usually mention cattle, guard dogs, thieves, and deepwater areas, not to mention that the pragmemes associated with restricted contents, disadvantageous objects, and contingencies are usually realized with wordings in American English public signs but usually with symbolic images in Vietnamese counterparts. Besides, such pragmemes as GIVING URGENT HELP and MENTIONING ACCIDENT RECORDS are not only more often but also of more various contexts in American English public signs than in Vietnamese ones, except for THE ZERO DISTANCE TO DESTINATIONS and THE CLOSE CONNECTION BETWEEN OBJECTS AND THEIR STATUS, which appear in the opposite direction. These mainly reflect the differences in the nature of geography and social customs of the two speech communities that should be highlighted for intercultural communication (Lado, 1957; Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Implications for the English translation of public signs in Vietnam

The study results may allow translating public signs from Vietnamese (L1) into English (L2) (assumed from the American backgrounds) with the optional focus on either the source language (to show and conserve the native identity) or the target language (to make it familiar to the English-speaking visitors, especially those from the US), or even some hybridity that can reflect both cultures.

In case of L1 being attended to, English is just a tool to encode Vietnamese cultural schemas and pragmemes, that is, although the wording is in English (grammar and vocabulary), the signs are actually written in the way that most Vietnamese people will find familiar (e.g. *Wish you safety on the road*). However, some aspects may be affected by the English counterparts as a result of the language contact so much so that they seem unlikely to be translated in the completely L1 sense. For example, the public signs such as '*Không được X*' ('Do not *X*') or '*Cấm X*' ('Prohibit *X*') are ubiquitous in Vietnamese but tend to be translated into English as '*Please do not X*' or '*No X*', '*No X-ing*'; also, the object-status signs such as '*Bàn đã đặt*' ('Table reserved') or '*Hết vé*' ('Sold-out tickets') will be often translated into English as '*Reserved*' and '*Sold out*'.

In case of L2 being concerned, it is advisable that the English pragmemes and their instantiations should be carefully noticed beforehand and should be strictly followed, while some differences in comparison with Vietnamese should also be acknowledged to prevent some negative interferences they may cause during the translation. For example, although the

Vietnamese formulations of the practs for indicating the tagged object as the starting or ending point of a territory (pragmeme 2.2 & 3.5) is limited to highway contexts, many others should not be ignored when translated into English. This might be a good chance for some cultural conceptualizations embedded in Vietnamese public signs to be reconstructed so that the pragmemes can be updated with more objects, situations and formulations involved in practs.

In the case of creating a hybrid translation, different pragmemes and their practs based on the pragmatic cultural schemas of both languages can be used together at the same sphere. For example, the hybrid sign like *'Now leaving Ho Chi Minh city. Wish you safety on the road. See you again soon'* is constructed on the common knowledge of farewell associated with territory separation from both English and Vietnamese; besides, the public signs with only symbolic images in Vietnam may include explanatory wording in English as a translation. According to Fludernik (1998, p. 13), such hybridity is not just a mixture of the two cultures but rather a "third place" where the two parties affect each other and the hybridization as well so that their experience, knowledge instantiated in the language meaning and use will be constantly cross-understood and updated.

Conclusion

Overall, this study is successful, to a certain extent, in interpreting and contrasting the American English and Vietnamese use in public signs from the perspectives of cultural linguistics and pragmatics. The results show that both American English and Vietnamese pragmatic cultural schemas trigger the same speech acts expressed in public signs. The differences are notified in the pragmemes related to territory indication, restriction, reminding, warning, command, and prohibition; also in the formulation and enactment of the practs. However, the study results are not meant to describe how all the public signs in American English and Vietnamese present, but rather to detect certain norms that are familiar to people of the speech communities no matter how conscious they are of these (Wierzbicka, 1998, p. 245). Sharifian (2017, pp. 60-61) also notes that a speech community member can choose a certain pragmeme with certain related practs based on the shared cultural schemas, but in fact, not all components of a cultural schema are understood in the way they are in the overall system. Given that, the study has finally made a positive contribution to the strategies of public sign translation from Vietnamese into English (based on the American assumptions) with a systematic background of pragmatic cultural factors. More research into public signs and their translation should be done on a larger scale and/or within many other languages so that the approach can be confirmed and updated with more significant findings.

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Biodata

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Students' and Lecturers' Perceptions of Idioms Teaching and Learning in Speaking Skill for Freshmen at FOE, Thuongmai University

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ABSTRACT

The situation of teaching and learning idioms in developing speaking skills for freshmen was investigated at the Faculty of English, Thuongmai University in Vietnam – a foreign language context – as well as the difficulties faced by lecturers and students while teaching and learning idioms, and the strategies used while processing the idioms. It also looked at how the idiom teaching method was evaluated in two freshman language classrooms and offered some suggestions for how to improve students' interest and engagement in learning English idioms, particularly in strengthening their speaking skills. Survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews were used to gather information. The study indicated that university lecturers and students were efficient in idioms teaching and learning in certain aspects. Both of them believed that students were motivated, felt calm, confident, and actively engaged in idiomatic learning activities in this foreign language setting. According to the findings, students demonstrated the process of idiom comprehension as well as idiom production via evidence in the comprehension of idiomatic terms. The findings indicated that context significantly influences idiom acquisition and that idiom learning in EFL classes should be prioritized.

Keywords:

Perception, idioms' teaching and learning, speaking skill

1. Introduction

Wishing that the apprehension of a nation's language thoroughly and master English well when studying it is the desire of many people. While it is like the grease that makes language flow, it also presents an extra obstacle to both students and English teachers. Nowadays, English has been widely used in Vietnam, and it is also a compulsory subject in all schools, colleges and universities. Teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Vietnam has elicited divisive societal reactions when students are accused of being unable to converse properly in English after six or seven years of study (Tran, 2012). Even though some of them have excellent grammar and vocabulary, they are unable to converse in English. They continue to struggle to communicate since what English language speakers really say to them differs from what they

have been familiar with.

On one side, English idiomatic phrases are quite common in everyday English. According to Copper (1998), over the course of a 60-year existence, an English native speaker uses about 20 million idioms. These staggering figures demonstrate the indisputable importance of colloquial words in everyday communication. In fact, Cornell (1999) said that idioms have always been an important part of language studies, whether in linguistics or language acquisition.

Furthermore, teaching methodology, particularly in the context of teaching English in Vietnam, is still restricted. In the past, English teachers concentrated solely on grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing, but speaking and listening were neglected; as a result, pupils were unable to talk and express themselves in English. English began to be taught using a skill-based technique later in the decade, in the 2000s. As a result, children must acquire four abilities in isolation: speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Despite the benefits of this method, word power, such as set phrases and formulaic expressions, is undervalued, which contributed to the most significant unfavorable aspect. (Tran, 2012).

Fernando (1996), Wray (2000), Schmitt (2000), and Simpson and Mendis (2003), on the other hand, believe that idiom mastery is often associated with native speaker fluency. If communication breaks down, a lack of idiom knowledge can undermine the relationships and impede good intercultural competence (Alhaysony, 2017). In communication, speaking competently considers being the most basic session for a communicator who does it fluently (Tran, 2021). In fact, one of the requirements for IELTS speaking evaluation is idiomatic proficiency. The IELTS speaking band descriptors emphasize the use of idiomatic language and collocation as indicators of lexical resource usage in bands 7, 8, and 9. All of the students, including the first-year students (freshmen) in FOE, are expected to achieve advanced level (C1) in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) or the equivalent after their graduation and speaking is one of the criteria they need to improve if they desire to gain the qualification. They represent the young generation who hoped to have the capacity to use English effectively; as a result, a thorough understanding of idioms will aid students in becoming better communicators, particularly in English instruction. However, in foreign language education circumstances, idiom instruction may not have gotten enough attention, particularly in speaking contexts (Vasiljevic, 2011). Teachers and students in Vietnam avoid employing idiomatic expressions in English, and few are aware of the value of idioms in communication (Tran, 2012). They may have struggled with selecting an acceptable teaching approach, picking idioms, and explaining how to apply an idiom in appropriate circumstances.

This study focused on the situation of idioms teaching and learning in Vietnam, where English is taught as a foreign language; as a result, it was possible to explore the challenges that lecturers and students encounter, as well as suggest some solutions to close a gap in the literature on idioms teaching and learning research. Learning to utilize idiomatic phrases appropriately is also an essential element of mastering international English for students of English as a second or foreign language.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition and classification of idioms

Idiomatic expressions are those whose meanings cannot be deduced from the meanings of the words that make up the term. They have, however, hidden meanings (Idiomatic Expression, 2015). "Language is more or less idiomatic in the spectrum of idiomaticity," as Lennon (1998) put it. Other scholars, such as Cooper (1999), focused on "idioms are multi-word units with non-literal meaning." According to Simpson and Mendis, an idiom is a group of words appearing in a more or less fixed phrase whose overall meaning cannot be predicted by analyzing the meaning of its individual parts (Ibid.). Idioms are "indivisible units whose components cannot be altered and can only be modified within specified units," according to Fernando (1996). (p. 30). Gibbs (1987) divided idioms into four categories: syntactically frozen, syntactically flexible, transparent, and opaque idioms.

Idioms have been classified in a variety of ways. Pure idioms, partly literal, and literal idioms are classified by Fernando (1996, p32). Core idioms, figurative idioms, and ONCEs are the three groups that Grant (2007) classifies idioms into.

According to Simpson and Mendis (2003) and Zyzik (2011), an idiom is a group of words that co-occur in a more or less fixed phrase, the metaphorical meaning of which cannot be predicted looking at the meaning of its constituents.

2.2. The Importance of Idiomatic Competence in Language Learning

Lundblom and Woods (2012) emphasized the significance of understanding idioms. They were inclined to believe that idioms are clearly given in academic contexts and that inability to grasp idioms might have an impact on academic achievement, written composition, reading comprehension, and vocabulary, especially as students' ages and grades progress. "Idiomatic competence is the capacity to correctly communicate using idioms in the roles of both an addressor and an addressee," according to Buckingham (2006) and Burke (1988). Like other language competencies, Figurative competence refers to the ability to communicate successfully using and interpreting idioms. It enables non-native speakers to properly grasp daily discussions (Burke, 1998, Buckingham, 2006). According to Boers et al. (2006), the value of idiomatic phrases to language learners is that it allows communicators to encode and decode the meaning of a discussion completely. Wray (2000) looks into the units of multi-word like idioms in speaker production and listener comprehension, finding that they help speakers create an efficient process and organize discourse and assist hearers in profoundly understanding the speaker's view and identify the individual identity. Even though many studies have previously been done on various elements of vocabulary acquisition, learning, and usage (e.g., MacArthur, 2010; Randolph, 2017; Wahyuni & Rozani Syafei, 2016; Zou, 2017), the subject of idiomaticity has been mostly ignored. In Vietnam, teaching and learning idioms seem to be frowned upon by both instructors and pupils. Consequently, because of the number of idiomatic expressions they employ in their speech, they have a hard time understanding speakers in the inner circle.

2.3. The Relationship between Idioms and Speaking Skill

Idioms are widely employed in everyday English discourse because they enrich the communication's substance and allow speakers to express themselves effectively (Thyab, 2016). Idioms must be used to achieve greater English expressive levels, especially for EFL learners (Xie, 2017). Speaking clearly and smoothly is essential for successful communication, not just in everyday interactions but also in job interviews (Chau, 2021). These staggering figures demonstrate the indisputable importance of idiomatic expressions in everyday language use, particularly in the ability to interact with others. Idioms are often unavoidable in conversations, making them a must in language programs to improve their communicative skills. When a person learns English idioms, he or she changes the language from its formal written form into a natural form that allows the speaker to use more culturally relevant words. In a similar spirit, Simpson and Mendis (2003) suggested that idiom mastery is frequently linked to native speaker fluency, citing Fernando (1996), Schmitt (2000), and Wray (2000). In actuality, idiomatic competence is one of the IELTS speaking band descriptors' requirements, and using idiomatic vocabulary and collocation are indicated as signals for the use of lexical resources in bands 7, 8, and 9.

2.4. Issues in Teaching Idioms

There have been claims that teaching and learning idioms have been difficult (e.g., Chen & Lai, 2013). It is apparent that the teachers may find it challenging to motivate pupils to learn (or apply) idioms outside of the classrooms (Al-Kadi, 2015) because the possibility of such extension may appear remotely. Many instructors and students in Vietnam say that learning idioms are one of the most challenging aspects of learning a foreign language. In reality, idioms are "notoriously complex" (Celce-Murcia & Larsen Freeman, 1999, p. 39), as later academics have pointed out (Liu, 2003, Zyzik, 2011). Idioms have traditionally been taught as part of vocabulary instruction. Idioms were formerly addressed separately and independent of context. However, a growing number of techniques and tactics are being used to teach idioms. Copper (1999) looked at the usage of idiom comprehension methods. The most frequent techniques are guessing from context and employing literal meaning. Many scholars, including Liu (2003), have stated that instructors in a foreign language setting have found it difficult to aid students in learning idioms. Idiom selection is another contentious topic when it comes to teaching idioms. Which idioms, from the many in the dictionary, should be taught? Should we teach idioms in individual lessons or as part of a larger curriculum? Or, more specifically, what activities may be utilized to teach idioms? It has been argued that idioms look to users of other languages to be unduly complex (Liu, 2003, McLellan, 2010). Despite Lontas' (2017) claim that language programs should emphasize idioms, idioms are often avoided by both pupils and teachers in Vietnam. With the aid of a teacher's deliberate effort, students in a foreign language context, such as Vietnam, can effectively comprehend and produce idioms in their linked speech. Furthermore, students' opinions about idioms appearing in real language are likely to alter.

Research Questions

This research examines the case of teaching idioms to freshmen at FOE, TMU, using an integrated method. The responses to the following research questions are addressed.

1. What is the current situation of idioms teaching and learning at FOE, TMU?
2. What are the lecturers' and students' perceptions of their teaching and learning of idioms?

3. Methods

3.1. Pedagogical Setting & Participants

This research focused on the teaching and learning of idioms in Vietnam, where English is taught as a second language. For learners studying this language as a second or foreign language, mastering the use of colloquial phrases is critical.

A group of 100 freshmen at FOE, TMU who had learned English for four to ten years in school and were deemed to be at a pre-intermediate level of English were used as informants. These students were expected to obtain a C1 or equivalent in the CEFR, and it has since become a required certificate prior to graduation.

Being a current lecturer at FOE, TMU, the researcher has a favorable opportunity to get to know about the freshmen because they were expected to achieve C1, and speaking was one of the criteria they need to improve if they desired to gain the qualification. They represented the young generation who were required to have the capacity to use English under the oriented communication at competitive job market; therefore, a strong knowledge of idioms would help them to become better speakers in communication.

The supportive participation of 10 lecturers who were in charge of teaching speaking skills at FOE, TMU were indispensable in this study. They had experience teaching English language skills from about 5 to 20 years. They all had Master's degrees in English language teaching and obtained C1 certificates. These lecturers were selected because the author desired to compare the lecturers' and students' perceptions of idioms teaching and learning.

3.2. Design of the Study

The questionnaires for students were written in English and were translated into Vietnamese to ensure that they could understand the researcher's requirements and study purposes thoroughly. It contains 13 questions that investigate the situation of teaching and learning idioms and student self-evaluation of their idioms teaching and learning efficacy. The purpose of the study necessitates the gathering of lecturers' opinions, which the questionnaire accomplishes. Similar to the survey questionnaire for students, the survey questionnaire for lecturers also consists of 13 questions with the same content to help the researcher compare lecturers' and students' opinions about idioms teaching and learning.

The interview used in this study is a semi-structured interview. While it is anticipated that this kind covers every topic in the protocol, the researcher has some leeway to go further into participant replies by seeking clarification or more information. Furthermore, interviewers have

the flexibility to be friendlier and more social. Semi-structured questions were created in particular to allow the researcher to have a thorough grasp of the idiom's teaching and learning of interest, which is required for the development of relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions.

After collecting and analyzing data from the questionnaire, five lecturers and ten students who provided rich information and showed their interest were invited for an in-depth interview. Then the researcher notified the participants about the time and place that the interview was conducted. The researcher has made sure that the interviewees felt comfortable at this interview venue and time. Similar to the questionnaires, the interview questions for students were translated into Vietnamese so that they were able to express their ideas freely. The interview, including six questions related to idioms, teaching and learning, was designed.

3.3. Data collection & analysis

The study has used mixed methods, including quantitative and qualitative, to clarify the issues. The data gathering method was broken down into three parts.

Stage 1: The participants, including lecturers and freshmen in FOE, TMU who were invited and were introduced with researcher's study contents and purposes.

Stage 2: The questionnaire with 13 questions provides careful instructions and explanations to shed light on two research questions. It focuses on criteria for selecting idioms for teaching, teaching approaches, lecturers and student's opinions on teaching methods, idiom-related activities in lessons, sources and teaching material for idioms, etc. Next, the questionnaire was administered to the ten selected lecturers, and 100 first-year students were then collected for analyzing process. The collected data were analyzed through content-based that the results of content analysis were numbers and percentages. In particular, each question was analyzed with the number and percentage of participants' responses to the various aspects related to the teaching and learning idioms, especially in speaking skills, to clarify lecturers' and students' evaluations of the situation. If the data show that it is not adequately concerned, the author can conclude that the limitation and difficulty exist.

Stage 3: Five lecturers and ten students who provided rich information and showed interest were invited for an in-depth interview after collecting and analyzing data from the questionnaire. A semi-structured interview consisting of six questions about the topic studied was conducted in 30 minutes. All the data collected were taken into the analysis process. Additional comments from interviews to clarify the questionnaire's data were discussed and compared in detail to find the similarities and differences. Perceptions of teachers and students towards teaching and learning idioms were made clearer. Therefore, the two research questions were answered, and solutions to tackling the difficulty encountered while teaching and learning English and to improve the student motivations and involvement in learning idioms were then suggested.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. The situation of teaching and learning idioms

In terms of the real context, the research focused on lecturers' factors when choosing idioms, teaching techniques, and idiom-related activities.

Table 1. Criteria for Selecting Idioms for Teaching

Criteria	Students		Lecturers	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Relevance to the contents of the lessons	38	38%	7	70%
Frequency in use	25	25%	4	40%
Cultural suitability	11	11%	2	20%
Being up to date	0	0%	0	0%
Fitting students' language level	27	27%	10	100%
Others	0	0%	0	0%

Despite a minor variation in priority among the criteria, lecturers and students both regard relevance to the contents of the courses (70 percent and 38 percent, respectively), suiting students' language level (27 percent for students and 100 percent for professors), and frequency in usage (25 percent and 40 percent). Lecturers were concerned about their students' English levels (100 percent) and relevance to the topic of the courses (70 percent), and students who were more engaged in two criteria were similarly concerned. Some of the students concerned about cultural suitability for choosing idioms for teaching (11%) while more lecturers bear in mind about it (20%). This information was also used to support Vygotsky's (1978) idea of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which states that knowing a student's English level or identifying their specific ZPD will recommend appropriate learning aid. Zizek also advised paying attention to the most common idioms (2009). Zyzik suggested that idioms be chosen based on their frequency of use or familiarity (2009). These criteria help instructors include numerous commonly used idioms while excluding those that are rarely used. When choosing idioms for their pupils, lecturers and students might refer to Liu's (2003) and Grant (2007)'s study on idiom frequency of occurrence.

In terms of an idioms-related teaching method, idioms were taught and presented in either hearing or reading activities, according to the question, "How did you/your lecturers teach idioms?" Idioms were taught through integrated-skill exercises that included listening and reading skills as well as in speaking activities.

Table 2. Teaching approaches

Approaches	Students		Lecturers	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Idioms were taught separately in idiom-focus activities	6	6%	0	0%
Idioms were taught integrated with listening activities	4	4%	2	20%
Idioms were taught integrated with reading activities	38	38%	6	60%
Idioms were taught integrated with speaking activities	15	15%	4	40%
Idioms were taught in integrated-skill activities	50	50%	8	80%

Table 2 shows that reading activities were used to teach and learn idioms (38 percent for students and 60 percent for lecturers), which was the receptive skill (Harmer, 2001). Furthermore, the findings revealed that idioms were also taught through listening exercises (4 percent for students and 20 percent for teachers). These exercises served as a source of linguistic input for the pupils. Lecturers are likely to have helped pupils develop productive abilities such as speaking and writing. The terms "knowledge of a language" and "skill at using it" are not interchangeable (Bygate, 1987, p. 3). As a result, if idioms are exclusively taught through listening and reading activities, students will have little opportunity to practice their newly learned idioms. As a result, teaching idioms through speaking exercises was critical for the development of speaking skills, particularly in communication. However, the results revealed that 15% of students and 40% of lecturers agreed that idioms were taught in conjunction with speaking exercises (less than reading activities).

Furthermore, *"rather than explaining the meaning of idioms, it is necessary to focus more on speaking and writing with idioms."* according to several informants (Oanh and Thuy, informants). *"More role plays are needed to inject idioms into our speech. It's not enough to know idioms. It is much better if we get the opportunity to talk and utilize idioms in a communicative context after learning their meaning in reading or listening tasks."*, some students added. The majority of them agreed that idioms should be taught in a mixed-methods approach with a high level of interaction between teachers and students.

According to the results of the survey, lecturers (80%) and students (50%) said they learned idioms through integrated skill exercises. The integrated skill method (Oxford, 2001), in which all language abilities are taught in theme-based models or task-based instruction centered on communicative objectives to assist students in communicating in English, has recently aroused their interest. It is beneficial for students by "practicing all language skills in an integrated, natural, conversational style, even if one skill is the primary focus of a given volume" (Oxford, 2001, p. 18).

A number of instructional activities were imaginatively created and executed to assist students in understanding idioms better, as shown in tables 3 and 4. According to 50% of instructors and

29% of students, the textbook almost determined the idiomatic exercises. Hang (a teacher) claims that she generally changes textbook exercises to match the learning styles of her pupils and her teaching objectives.

Table 3. Lecturers' opinion on teaching methods

Statements	Lecturers				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Idioms were presented in a variety of ways	20%	50%	20%	10%	0%
2. Idioms activities were almost determined by the textbook	20%	30%	0%	50%	0%
3. Different teaching aids were used to help ease the idioms learning process	40%	20%	30%	10%	0%

Table 4. Students' opinion on teaching methods

Statements	Students				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Idioms were presented in a variety of ways	18%	33%	41%	8%	0%
2. Idioms activities were almost determined by the textbook	0%	31%	40%	29%	0%
3. Different teaching aids were used to help ease the idioms learning process	20%	41%	37%	2%	0%

Table 5 shows the inventiveness with which idiom-related tasks were designed. The lecturers used a variety of exercises, including matching, idiom sharing, flash-card games, and role-playing. The most common activities are idiom matching, idiom sharing, and role-playing with idioms. Students were enthralled by the idioms sharing since they were easier to memorize and use than the other idioms in the book. In the research, the lecturers used a variety of approaches and skills in teaching vocabulary to cope with idioms. In particular, idiom-related activities were effective in promoting the development of speaking skills through teaching idioms. Many studies, including Cooper, 1998, Lennon, 1998, and Zyzik, 2009, believed that teaching idioms should be contextualized and separated into two steps: students' idiom awareness and students' use and practice of idioms. The first stage can occur during reading or listening activities, while the second is more likely to occur during speaking and writing activities.

However, board games, quizzes, word clouds, and video watching are not commonly used, according to the data. Many students believe that lecturers might teach idioms more effectively if they utilize actual recordings. In order to learn idioms, students desired to play activities such as board games, quizzes, and word clouds. The majority of them shared the same ideas that they

desire to be taught idioms through mixed methods such as storytelling, games, context with high interaction between lecturers and students. They also thought that when they were the learner center, idioms teaching and learning was more effective, motivating, and fun.

Matching, exchanging idioms, and role-playing with idioms are the most popular activities, although theatrical performing was also popular. *“At first, it was really tough for us, but after we realized that we could communicate our views and feelings through idioms, we were very encouraged to participate in these activities,”* Long added (a student). Furthermore, *“students are more likely to utilize idioms naturally.”* Nhung observed, *“Students are driven to have dialogues with roles in certain circumstances”* (a lecturer). *“I occasionally tell the students a tale using idioms. Although my students are aware of the story's premise, I employ idioms in the story. They are enthralled by it and are more likely to recall the set words. The idioms can then be used in a similar scenario.”*, Lan (a professor) revealed as another contextual method. Therefore, it can be said that using the idiom-related activities contributed significantly to the effectiveness of teaching idioms.

Table 5. Idiom-related activities (Lecturers' opinions)

Activities (times)	Teachers					Students				
	>10	7-9	4-6	1-3	Not used	>10	7-9	4-6	1-3	Not used
1. Story telling	0	0	1	6	3	0	0	4	28	50
2. Quizzes	0	1	0	2	7	0	2	8	62	22
3. Board games	0	0	0	1	9	0	0	0	22	74
4. Matching (idioms and meaning)	1	1	6	3	0	0	2	12	68	20
5. Word clouds	0	1	2	2	5	0	0	4	54	40
6. Dominos	0	0	0	2	8	0	0	0	28	76
7. Idiom sharing	0	4	2	3	1	0	8	42	32	14
8. Role play	0	1	6	2	1	0	20	20	56	10
9. Video watching	0	0	1	3	6	0	0	8	12	84
10. Flash card activities	1	0	3	4	2	0	0	10	56	32
11. Theatre playing with idioms	0	0	2	3	5	0	0	10	26	62
12. Dialogue writing	0	0	0	2	8	0	0	0	12	86
13. Discussion	1	1	2	6	0	0	2	20	74	4
14. Idiom glossary	1	4	2	3	0	0	16	28	48	4
15. Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	84

The majority of the teaching and learning resources came from the textbook, the Internet, and idiom reference books. Students utilized other sources to seek idioms such as their instructors, movies, music, and TV shows, whereas lecturers concentrated solely on these three referential sources. These were also great idiom sources that they might think about using in their classes. Because of the use of idioms in the final test at FOE, the majority of lecturers and students utilized idioms from the textbook to teach or study idioms. Another interesting statistic was that

just 5% of students learned idioms through newspapers and magazines, despite the fact that these publications constituted real dialogue. This might be due to a lack of exposure to English-language periodicals and publications among Vietnamese pupils. Rather, they were more familiar with online video snippets, news, and broadcasts. As a consequence, 70% of students and 50% of lecturers stated that they used the Internet to find teaching and learning resources on idioms. These numbers appear to represent the trend of teaching and learning English through the Internet's innovation.

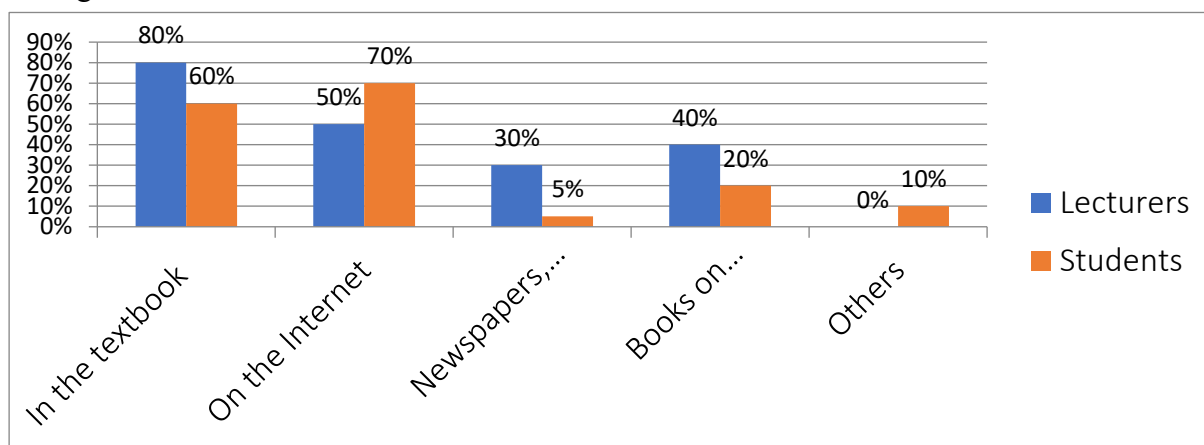


Figure 1. Sources and teaching/ learning materials for idioms

4.2. Self-evaluations of lecturers and students on the efficacy of their idioms teaching and learning

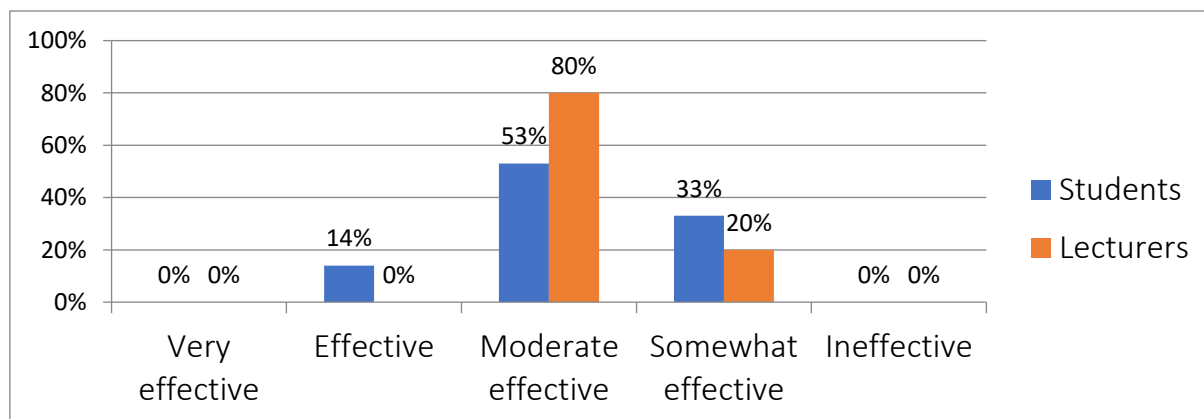


Figure 2. Lecturers' and students' general evaluation of idiom teaching and learning

From the students' and lecturers' perspectives, there were differing views on their teaching and learning efficacy. When 14 percent of the participants thought idiom teaching and learning was successful, 53 percent thought it was somewhat effective, and 33 percent thought it was somewhat effective, it appeared that pupils were more optimistic. On the other hand, Lecturers only chose moderately successful (80%) and slightly effective (20%) teaching methods. The majority of the participants in the interview thought that their idioms, teaching and learning were moderately effective. Thanh, a student, explained that reading text and glossary were relatively effective for reviewing idioms in specific contexts. However, students did not have

the opportunity to be trained in many different skills. As Mai gave her estimations why she thought idioms teaching was efficient: *“In my opinion, the course's most beneficial aspect is that it assists my students in recognizing the existence of idiomatic phrases in real sources. They can focus on idiomatic words in their future study after they grasp and feel the value of these phrases. In the past, we've overlooked this important aspect of language.”* She said that students' awareness of the importance and comprehension of idioms was a success of the course. Thus, the ways for students to practice and use idioms in speaking need a long time to teaching more closely.

Table 6. Lecturers' and students' evaluation of idioms teaching and learning in detail

Statements	Lecturers					Students				
	SA	A	N	D	SD	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. The idiom- related activities matched your students' level	0%	30%	50%	20%	0%	6%	54%	36%	4%	0%
2. The idiom-related activities were successful	0%	40%	40%	20%	0%	0%	51%	43%	6%	0%
3. You felt confident and relaxed when teaching/learning idioms	0%	30%	60%	10%	0%	20%	41%	37%	2%	0%
4. Your students/You have demonstrated the progress in idiom comprehension	20%	40%	40%	0%	0%	0%	44%	52%	4%	0%
5. Your students/You have demonstrated the progress in using idiomatic expressions	0%	20%	50%	30%	0%	0%	33%	61%	2%	4%
6. Your students/You enjoyed the idioms learning activities	10%	60%	30%	0%	0%	14%	35%	35%	14%	2%
7. Your students /You were motivated to learn idioms	0%	70%	30%	0%	0%	0%	40%	47%	11%	2%
8. Your students/You actively participated in the learning process	0%	60%	40%	0%	0%	0%	42%	37%	17%	4%

The appropriateness of idioms and the pupils' English proficiency are contentious topics. Thirty percent of lecturers felt that the learning activities were appropriate for their students' levels, while the remaining twenty percent (20%) did not. More than half of the students, on the other hand, thought that their English level corresponded to the idiom-related activities (6 percent strongly agree, 54 percent agree). When it came to the success of the idiom exercises, both lecturers and students had similar sentiments, with 40% and 51% agreeing and fully agreeing with statement 2. Lecturers did not appear to be confident or relaxed when teaching idioms. On assertion 3, the majority of them were undecided (60 percent neutral). This can be explained by the fact that teachers did not feel comfortable using idioms in their interactions. Not only did the lecturers agree that utilizing idioms in their discussions is difficult, but the students also believed that idioms were too difficult to learn since their meanings were not literal, and they

were unlikely to be encouraged to use and understand idioms in practice. Furthermore, they were probably not taught idioms in a methodical manner so that they could completely comprehend the meaning, usage, and context of each phrase and their laziness while studying at home. Table 6 shows indications of growth in employing idioms in student language development outcomes, but the proportion was not that convincing. Only 20% of instructors and 33% of students believed that their idiomatic competence had improved. The majority of them remained unconcerned about this assertion (50% and 61%, respectively). The majority of lecturers, like the students, feel that idiom-learning activities are enjoyable and that students are driven to acquire idioms (10% and 60% for both strongly agree and agree on choices, respectively) (14% and 35% for both agree and agree on options, respectively).

This discovery indicated students' positive views about idiom learning. Besides, the students also gave some suggestions to minimize the difficulties and make teaching and learning idioms in speaking skills more effective. Some students recommended that teachers could organize more exciting games (with prizes) and idioms-related activities such as flash-card, mind-map, storytelling, video watching, outdoor activities, contextualization activities, to help students learn and apply them in speaking skills more easily. Lecturers should give students some idioms each lesson and require them to repeat or make conversations with them regularly to remember the meaning and use. Some others thought that students themselves had to spend more time learning idioms at home and communicating with native speakers to help them improve their speaking skills.

5. Conclusion

This research explores the situation and students' and lecturers' perceptions of idioms teaching and learning in light of the speaking skills approach for freshmen of English at TMU in Vietnam. Firstly, the research shows the situation that idioms have been taught to the first-year students of FOE, yet it mainly in reading skills and very restricted on other skills, particularly in speaking. Both instructors and students in this foreign language environment agree that pupils are motivated, calm, and confident and actively participate in idiomatic learning activities. According to the findings, students have demonstrated the process of idiom awareness and understanding via evidence in the evaluation of idioms education. These positive idiom learning results are the result of the creative utilization of idiom-related instructional activities designed for reading skill tasks, but no such activities exist for speaking skill tasks. Because learners utilize various techniques to understand the meaning of idioms, they should be given the opportunity to learn and practice various abilities.

Second, the research shows that university lecturers and students were moderately efficient in idiom learning, with students being able to grasp and retain a few fundamental idioms. Despite their awareness of the importance of idioms and their acquisition in the process of learning English in EFL contexts, the majority of students seldom studied at home and rarely used idioms in their conversations. Their lack of idiomatic language exposure in their learning programs, the insufficiency of teachers' help in learning and using idioms, and an insufficient habit of accumulating idioms as phrases and chunks all contributed to their poor idiomatic competence.

The study reveals that idiom is a difficult part of teaching English. From the actual situation and the awareness of lecturers and students, idioms teaching might not be received sufficient attention at FOE yet. As a result, the study concluded that rather than an avoidable attitude in EFL classes, idioms should be given more emphasis in language classes to help students learn English in a foreign language setting. This material may aid freshmen at FOE and EFL learners, in general, to deepen their understanding of the target language and then communicate intentionally in English.

Within the limited time and restricted scope of research, certain shortcomings are inevitable. Firstly, this study was conducted on a relatively small sample of participants, so the results collected are not representative and cannot be generalized. Secondly, it is remarkable that the time for the data collection procedure is rather short, whereas the effect of teaching idioms needs studying for a long time, and the researcher does not have much time to investigate it in a long-term process.

During the implementation of the study, a number of questions for future research have been raised. Future studies should explore more about how to enhance students in learning idioms to upgrade their ability to use idioms in communication. Furthermore, it was necessary to focus on how much knowledge of the culture (in which the target language exists) learners need in order to acquire specific idioms. In addition, research on how learners comprehend idioms needs to be expanded and used to create instructional materials and teaching procedures with regard to idioms teaching and learning in speaking skills.

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Biodata

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Students' Attitude Towards Using Smartphones and Portable Devices for Studying Writing

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ABSTRACT

Mobile devices are now ubiquitous, which leads to a load of sequences, including mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). This notion has attracted various scholars to research so as to provide a spotlight on it for better exploitation. This study aims to shed light on the students' perception of the usefulness of mobile learning toward writing in terms of searching information and fluency, which did not support the spotlight in traditional study. The participants are the students coming from the English faculty of Dong Nai Technology University; they were at least sophomores with the obliged condition of being experienced in writing courses. Data collection from the questionnaire was conducted randomly by the students. The survey revealed that the learners enjoy m-learning as this framework performs well in helping students with information reaching. Besides, the research also indicates that the MALL system provides writing learners opportunities to enhance the ability to generate text regarding accuracy and fluency.

Keywords:

CALL, MALL, writing

Introduction

The mobile-assisted language learning system or MALL is defined as a part of e-learning (Georgiev et al., 2004), has been ubiquitous in various subjects, including writing learning since 1994 due to the efficiency of reaching the information, especially under the circumstance of the pandemic has occurred since 2020 up to now (Tran, 2021). In fact, using mentioned tool greatly provides both learners and instructors opportunities to personalize the knowledge (Chen, C-M., & Chung, C-J. 2008 as cited in Burston, 2013, pp. 167) as the devices allow learners to search the information individually. With the development of internet and wireless network like the third-generation (3G) and the fourth generation (4G), m-learning enables students the ability to reach information at any corner and provides the perfect opportunities for students to have a collaborative learning environment (Bui et al., 2021; Tran, 2021; Van et al., 2021). This circumstance, hence, really helps students in writing much. In terms of brainstorming, for instance, the students might search for the ideas, critique that idea, and generate other unique sequentially. Furthermore, the learners might look for structures and grammar lessons on the internet while composing the text, both in the class or outside the academic institution. Briefly, the MALL has been being applied on a wide range scale because of the reaching information ability.

In addition, mobile learning in writing is considered a platform to help learners with writing skills, which results in the enhancement of the learners. In academic writing course, although the m-learning has been implemented for years in some nations to help enhance student' ability, this genre of teaching approach still stay unlit in Viet Nam generally and particularly at the research location. Cahyono and Astuti (2019) and Pham and Nguyen (2019) concluded that the video-based for mobile phones bettered the students' ability to compose essays in terms of creativity. On the other hand, this framework has also been utilized in writing courses to enhance student grammar, vocabulary, and autonomy. By employing some means of the mobile-learning system, researchers (Gangaiamaran & Pasupathi, 2017) concluded that the quality of text generated by the learners increased. With the hope of taking advance from the mobile learning system, some schools and universities in Viet Nam have employed this system for a wide range of language skills teaching (Luu et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2021; Nguyen & Ngo, 2021). Therefore, this study investigates the students' attitude toward the mobile learning system in terms of searching information and fluency combined with precise terms in writing. The study implies that learners are keen on utilizing smartphones and other portable devices to reach more information for brainstorming ideas and background knowledge by analyzing the questionnaire results. They also share the similar concept that writing ability of accuracy and fluency might be improved.

Literature Reviews

The mobile-learning has motivated an array of scholars for years since its appearance in late 1997, when the internet came out and caused simultaneously positive and negative impacts on human being life, generally. Burstson (2013) reviewed a load of three hundred and forty-five studies in a stage between 1994 and 2012 and created a bibliography, which implied the drastically increasing development of m-learning. Since then, a lot of notions and terms have appeared, which resulted in the fact that researchers have implemented numerous works in the field. Most of the studies revealed the merits of MALL in some terms. The circumstance of the current pandemic all over the world of covid-19 prevents conventional classrooms, which leads to the fact that distance learning is the last choice. Accordingly, there comes the need to implement E-learning to not slow the study process (Tran & Nguyen, 2021; Tran, 2021; Pham & Tran, 2021). From the perspective of writing learning, mobile learning is considered a good framework with an array of means for mentors and learners to take an advance. Some authors stated the usefulness of MALL for students to enhance vocabulary (Chen & Hsieh, 2008) or sentences structure and organization(Fattah, 2015). Li and Hegelheimer (2013) and Noriega (2016) suggested that using means of mobile learning in writing contributes to students' better writing skills. All following studies present the effectiveness of MALL in detail of writing aspects of accuracy, fluency and attitude of learners.

Alemi et al. (2012) 's research focused on the retention of learning academic vocabulary via instant message (SMS) system in the long term and short term. The study was employed with forty-five non-English-majored freshmen at a university in Iran. The participants were divided into two groups of experimental with twenty-eight students and the control group with seventeen individuals. Both groups took part in a reading course with the same material. During sixteen weeks, the experimental group has instructed the material with an SMS vocabulary system whilst the dictionary taught the control group. The finding showed that the SMS system really helped the learners in the long term via the post-test, while there was no difference between SMS and dictionary-based instruction in the short term. Hence, the study stated the positive impact of one of the MALL learning means regard in the area of vocabulary.

In another study, Li & Hegelheimer (2013) explored the development and implementation of a web-based mobile software so-called Grammar Clinic for English as a second language (ESL) writing class. Nineteen intermediated students from an intact class at a university in the USA joined in the study lasting sixteen weeks. At the beginning of the course, a pre-test was held to measure the students' proficiency. Then, a demonstrating class of using the application came. During the semester, the students were asked to use the application outside class, which comprised grammar exercises in terms of error sentence structures, lexical errors, and "ambiguous expressions" to develop writing skills by feedback and self-regulation. Simultaneously, the learners took part in paper process composing activities at the class of increasing length of work with through alternatively the first, the second, the third and the fourth. Between the first and the third draft of the text, learners were required to fulfill three sets of the Grammar Clinic assignment. Due to the partly positive effect of the web-based software for mobile phones, most of the participants, at the same time, through a load of the process of writing like drafting, revising, editing, regulated their work and got enhanced.

Besides, Fattah (2015) examined the usefulness of WhatsApp messenger in order to increase the students' writing skills. The number of participants whose age ranged from twenty to thirty-five was thirty totally, and they were at level four of English major at Qassim college. There were two groups of participants, which were alternatively controlled and experimental. The experiment group used WhatsApp to enhance their skills, while the controlled group was taught by the prescribed book during a writing course last forty-five days. Pre-test analysis indicated that there was no difference between the groups in terms of the mean score. The post-test leads to the finding that the experimental group members who used the application outperformed the control group in terms of structure.

In addition, Noriega (2016) conducted a study with a freshman in a narrative English course at a university in Colombia in order to explore the usefulness of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in terms of text genres and features in the second language. During eight weeks, the student composed "personal recounts, autobiography and the short story" (Noriega, 2016) before receiving the instruction in class. After that, the writer was given a mobile device for weeks with the podcast about the lesson. In the third week, the student took a test and rewrote the composition after using the podcast. The standard to evaluate the learner's text quality was based on coherence. The author reported that via the analysis of the series of texts generated by the learner, using mobile learning in English learning could greatly help students improve writing in the field of the organization together with the structure. The learner also claimed the improvement of grammar and vocabulary, and motivation appeared in a short period in the interview after the course.

Cahyono and Astuti (2019) explored the effectiveness of mobile-based video learning in the process of writing at a vocational high school in Indonesia. There were sixty-one participants divided into experimental groups with thirty-one members and a controller group with thirty individuals. The whole study comprised five sessions with pre-test and post-test in which both control and experimental groups were taught to write procedure text. The control group was treated with the conventional method to write, whilst the experimental group was asked to conduct a video-based mobile assignment. Through a creative questionnaire, the author reported that students who were in the experimental group achieved better writing skills than the control group members.

In another elsewhere move, Yan (2019) conducted a study with the WeChat platform with eighty-eight undergraduate students from two classes to explore the idea of collaboratively learning writing applications. The students had to change the account into real names combined

with student numbers in small groups of five or six students. The teacher could publish materials, upload requirements, give instruction through this platform. Hence the students had opportunities to discuss together in writing activities. With the alternative turn of being a leader and peer feedback as well as discussion on the ideas, expression, structure and grammar points that occurred for every two days, the procedure showed that there were positive effects in terms of students writing due to the self-evaluation, peer-evaluation and teacher-evaluation under the setting of WeChat application- one means of MALL system. Through the second draft and questionnaire post-test, the researcher proved that the m-learning system could enhance students' ability to write efficiently.

All the precede literature indicated the effectiveness of the MALL when it was used to teach or learn writing. The mentioned previous studies successfully showed the effective impacts of MALL on learners' writing ability in terms of enhancing vocabulary (Saran & Seferoğlu, 2010) or grammar improvement (Baleghizadeh & Oladrostam, 2010) that cover the writing accuracy and writing fluency as well as autonomy (Sato et al., 2015), nevertheless, the student's attitude as well as perception toward using mobile phones and handy devices in writing as a tool to reach information still in debate. Furthermore, learners' perception of using portable facilities to improve writing skills, including fluency and accuracy, still needs shedding light on.

Research questions

To this end, this study addresses the following questions:

Research question 1(RQ1): To what extent do the students perceive m-learning in a writing course?

Research question 2(RQ2): What is learners' attitude in applying m-learning in studying writing to improve accuracy and fluency?

Methodology

Participants

This study was conducted at a second foreign language course of English- majored students at Dong Nai Technology University. Twenty- six students whose ages ranged between 19 and 21 took part in the survey. The students taking the class were at least sophomores, had taken academic writing courses as an oblige in the curriculum. Accordingly, the participants had some experience in writing. They understood the process of composing text in the academic writing field and the method to generate the work effectively. Moreover, the learners also experienced the e-learning system of the university at home due to the covid-19 pandemic resulting in the social distance campaign, which created the impression toward mobile learning and computer-assisted language learning system (CALL).

The questionnaire, Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire survey was designed and uploaded through system so-called Google form. The survey was designed with two central portions of searching information and fluency element combined with the accuracy proportion to investigate students' perception of m-learning in writing. Table 1 shows the total questions of the research on the attitude of learners.

Table 1. The Likert scale questionnaire on the attitude of students toward m-learning in learning writing.

No	Code	Questions	Disagree	Agree	Entirely Agree
1	SI1	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classrooms) helps you search for sentence models.	1	2	3
2	SI2	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you search for suitable vocabulary.	1	2	3
3	SI3	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you search for ideas.	1	2	3
4	SI4	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you search for the styles.	1	2	3
5	SI5	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you search for expressions, collocation and idioms.	1	2	3
6	AP1	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you shorten the time to generate the text.	1	2	3
7	AP2	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you have diversified expression and avoid repetition.	1	2	3
8	AP3	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you use transactive words logically, leading to coherence.	1	2	3
9	AP4	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you have better unity in the text.	1	2	3
10	AP5	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you lengthen your text.	1	2	3

The survey was designed as prior mentioned points due to the following hypotheses:

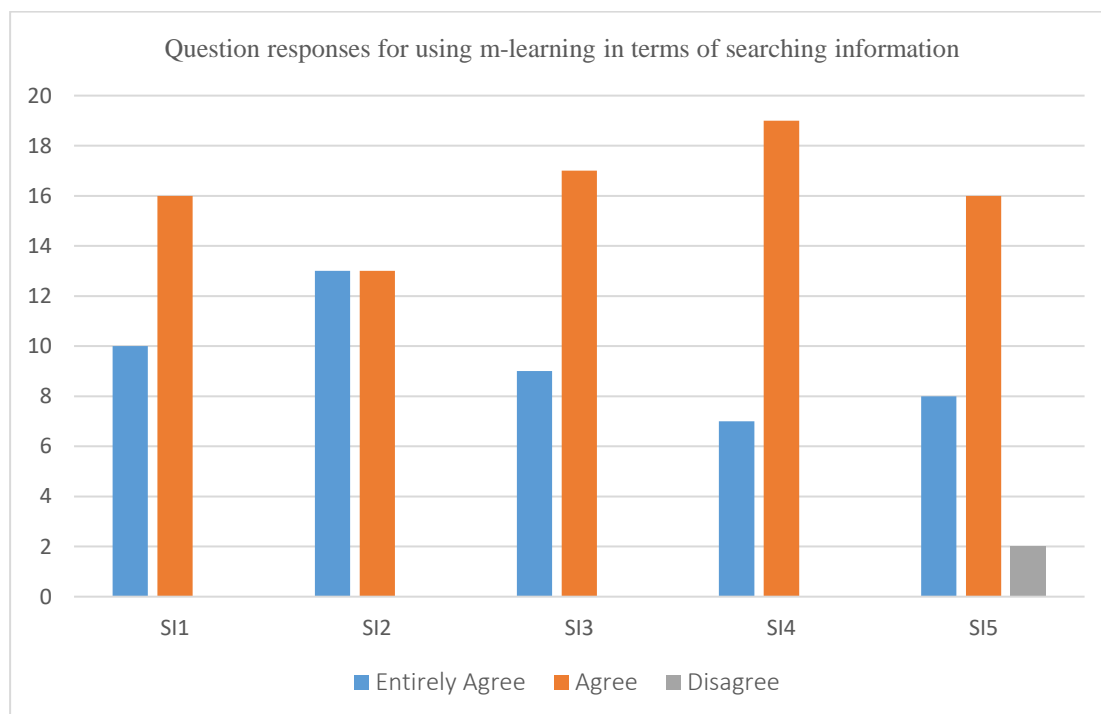
According to Lan and Sie (2010) (as cited in Chanprasert & Han, 2013, pp. 99), m-learning is defined as the activity of learning that learners could be able to take materials, lessons and instruction at any corners with the connection through wireless network and internet. This definition implied mobile phones, laptops and other handy devices like iPod, iPad and tablets. Similarly, Ozdamli and Cavus (2011) also pointed out that mobile learning is a model of pedagogy that provides learners more freely opportunities to access the materials and knowledge as well. The accessing the information in need, specifically, in writing periods. Hence, the first part of the questionnaire, with the questions range from 1 to 5, focuses on the searching information use of mobile learning.

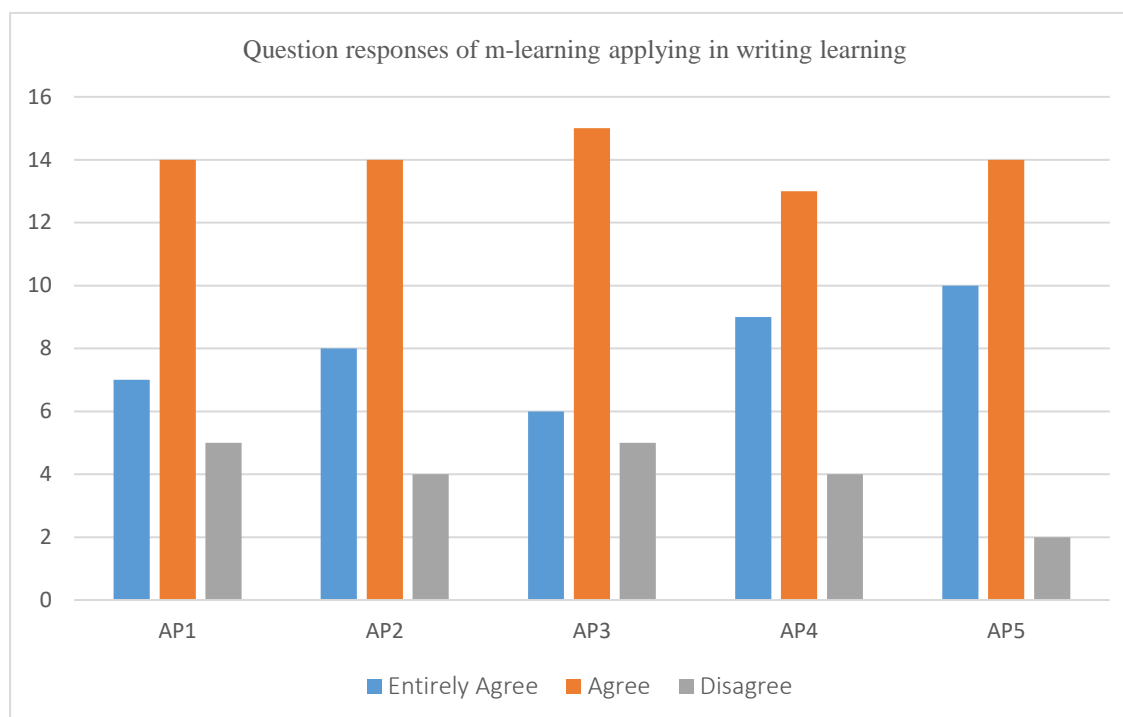
In terms of writing fluency, Biria and Jafari (2013) (as cited in Pham, 2021, pp. 5) concluded that writing fluency is "the total number of words or sentences written within a given allocated time, and they measured writing fluency by numbers of words or length of a text" (Pham, 2021). On the other hand, in terms of writing accuracy, Wolfe-Quintero et al. (1998) (as cited in Hartshorn 2008) defined the notion of accuracy by the statement: "the ability to be free from errors while using language to communicate." In broad meaning, the accuracy and fluency of

writing are mentioned in the second part of the questionnaire under the perspective of applying these points.

The questionnaire was uploaded publicly in order to give permission of access to all participants. The participants joining the survey chose the most suitable answer for each question, recorded and summarized by the platform Google. At the end of the study, 26 students from a second-foreign language class of foreign language faculty did the survey. A record including the information of the time, students' code and their response is being kept as a basic database for the study.

The total number of answers for each question is displayed in the following charts. The questions of the first part concentrating on the searching feature of m-learning in writing class range from 1 to 5 were coded as range SI1 to SI5; meanwhile, the questions range between questions 6 and 10 of the second portion explore the application of them-learning in writing fluency and accuracy are coded to AP1 to AP5.





The reliability of the responses for the questionnaire was analyzed through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. According to Hayes and Krippendorff (2007), the standard for reliability is based on the figure of Cronbach's alpha coefficient. According to Cronbach, the standard for the reliability of the figure is 0.6. In addition, Cronbach also stated that the good range of reliability is between 0.6 and 0.95. The figure is not reliable if the case is out of this range. The questionnaire was repetitive if the figure of reliability was at 0.95 and over, for instance.

The reliability of the responses from two parts of the questionnaire showed the results alternatively 0.893 and 0.892, which were over 0.6. This implicated that the questionnaire met the standard of the figure of alpha Cronbach, which meant this Likert scale basis could avoid repetition, and the students who took part in the survey understood the questions and made the decision later then.

Findings and discussion

The total number of responses to the survey was 26. All the participants fulfilled the questionnaire of the 3-point Likert scale completely. The aim of this study is to investigate the attitude of students toward m-learning in writing in two criteria. Table 2 shows that most students taking part in the survey have a positive outlook toward utilizing mobile phones and mobile devices in searching information for writing classes and writing activities. And table 3 reveals the attitude of learners toward using mobile phones and portable devices for enhancing writing fluency and accuracy via the mean figure of all responses.

Research question 1(RQ1): To what extent do the students perceive m-learning in a writing course?

The purpose of this question is to explore students' attitudes toward using mobile phones and other portable devices in learning writing as a tool to access information. Table 2 shows that the mean figures of each question tend toward the positive point of totally agree that the m-

learning system creates merits in searching data in writing class. Accordingly, the results implied that the student enjoyed utilizing the portable devices for taking information for studying writing. The big picture behind this phenomenon via the mean figure of the questions stated that m-learning gives students more chances to reach information of writing in terms of sentence models, vocabulary, ideas, styles, collocations and idioms. On the other hand, these results indicated the fact that mobile learning freely enables students to better the text.

The needs of the students for employing m-learning in writing class with the function of reaching information and materials are also revealed through the results. For the fact that the learners have a positive point of view toward the use of mobile learning in writing activities (including generating the text, reviewing, editing and rewriting), it is apparent that the students need the great support of the mobile system in terms of personalizing their studying, generally and in writing specifically. The process of composing the text with support coming from the smartphones was proved positively through the learners' attitude in the survey. Hence, through the questionnaire, the need coming from students to utilize the MALL is showed.

Table 2 The descriptive analysis of students' attitude toward using m-learning in terms of searching information.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
SI1	26	2,00	3,00	2,3846	,09730
SI2	26	2,00	3,00	2,5000	,10000
SI3	26	2,00	3,00	2,3462	,09515
SI4	26	2,00	3,00	2,2692	,08871
SI5	26	1,00	3,00	2,2308	,11513
Valid N (listwise)	26				

Research question 2(RQ2): What is the attitude of learners in applying m-learning in studying writing to improve accuracy and fluency?

In response to this question, the results for each question of the second part of the study implied that most students agree that using mobile learning in writing activities can enhance the writers' skills. In fact, accuracy and fluency are made up of a series of mentioned components in the hypotheses about accuracy and fluency. Through the questionnaire, these components are supported by them-learning. As the mean figure of the responses showed that m-learning provides the students some tools to apply in the writing course. Therefore, the quality of the text generated by the learners becomes better. In addition, through their answers, the students indicated their sense of demand for utilizing mobile devices in writing.

On the other hand, according to Table 3, the mean figures are approximately 2, which means the number of students' disagreements in the second part appeared. This revealed the fact that the students have some difficulties in using the mobile learning means in writing in terms of fluency and accuracy. Furthermore, this also pointed out that applying them-learning in writing fluency and accuracy is not so effective compared to the searching function. In greater detail, according to the responses coming from the students, utilizing mobile phones and portable devices in writing to enhance accuracy and fluency still have difficulties. All things considered, questions responses figure out the potential effectiveness of them-learning in the application of information reaching capability as well as writing accuracy and writing fluency. Additionally,

the application of MALL appeared to be an issue that needs further research with the more profound method of quasi-experimental research, pre-test and post-test with appropriate treatments and a larger number of participants which focus on the deployment of the concerned approach in terms of utilizing portable devices in writing accuracy and fluency.

Table 3 The descriptive analysis of students' attitude toward applying m-learning for studying writing

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
AP1	26	1,00	3,00	2,0769	,13500
AP2	26	1,00	3,00	2,1538	,13234
AP3	26	1,00	3,00	2,0385	,12986
AP4	26	1,00	3,00	2,1923	,13609
AP5	26	1,00	3,00	2,3077	,12114
Valid N (listwise)	26				

Conclusion, discussion and suggestion

Generally, the study found that the students have a positive attitude toward their learning in writing. The study results showed that the searching machine function of mobile learning dominates the applying function in terms of fluency and accuracy in writing courses. Besides, the findings of this article also revealed that m-learning provides learners tools to enhance the quality of the text, which are partly similar to previous studies (Sipra & Ahmad, 2016; Noriega, 2016; Li & Hegelheimer, 2013). Briefly, the learners enjoy the idea that m-learning greatly helps in writing study for searching information, accuracy and fluency enhancement.

Nevertheless, the study just concentrated on the attitude of the students with a small scale of samples. It would have been more successful if the study could handle a greater number of participants. Further research on the application of m-learning should be conducted with another research method of pre-test, the course of applying m-learning in writing and post-test so that the merits of mobile learning and more apparent attitude of learners will be provided spotlight. In addition, the difficulties in utilizing MALL are also a heated topic.

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Biodata

The author has experience in instructing English for over ten years, now he is in the phase of studying master degree at Dong Nai Technology University, Viet Nam. So far, the topic of collaborative writing as well as the effectiveness of MALL have stimulated the writer.

Exploring the Impacts of Doing Action Research on EFL Teachers' Professional Identities from an Ecological Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: action research (AR), professional identities, teacher identity, researcher identity

Having been introduced to Vietnamese EFL teachers since 2008 in the milieu of the National Foreign Languages Project 2020, action research (AR) is still a novel area of inquiry in English language teacher education in Vietnam. This study explored how doing AR affected four EFL teachers' construction and reconstruction of their professional identities to contribute to this area. Data were collected from semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the teachers to unveil their teaching and AR experiences. Drawing on Weaver-Hightower's (2008) ecological framework, the data were analyzed against four factors: *actors*, *relationships*, *environments* and *structures*, and *processes* woven into the three stages of AR (pre-research, while post-research). The results showed the influences of the complex nexus of these factors, with *relationships* and *environments and structures* standing out, on reconstructing the teachers' teacher identity and constructing their researcher identity. The study provides implications for how to use AR as a way to promote the professional development of teaching staff.

1. Introduction

Throughout the last three decades, there has been growing empirical interest in the impact of AR (henceforth AR) on language teaching (Burns, 2005). Despite possible problems teachers could encounter as a researcher, it has become easier for them to do AR thanks to Nunan's (1989) principled procedure, and teacher-centered AR is encouraged to be included in teacher professional development practices of education institutions (Goodnough, 2010). The positive relationship between doing AR and teacher professional development has also been confirmed (Borg, 2010, 2013; Burns, 2009, 2010; Nunan and Bailey, 2009). There is, however, a limited number of studies focusing on the correlation between doing AR and EFL teachers' professional identity construction and reconstruction (Steadman, Kayi-Ayda & Vogel, 2018; Tsui, 2007; Xun

& Zheng, 2014).

According to Canh (2018), though the concept of teacher professional development is not underexplored, it was introduced to Vietnamese teachers only since the 1990s as a variant often known as “*bồi dưỡng giáo viên*” (in-service teacher training). Since the National Foreign Languages Project was launched by Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training in 2008 to renovate EFL education across the country, most EFL teachers in Vietnam have been introduced to AR through workshops, one-off in-service teacher training sessions, or as a compulsory module of postgraduate TESOL teacher education programs. However, in most educational institutions in Vietnam, conducive research culture has not developed yet. Canh (2018) explained that it is because Vietnam's centralized education system seems to obstruct teacher autonomy, thus interfering directly with teachers' professional identity construction and reconstruction. This issue, along with a common perception among EFL teachers that doing AR is not their duty (Burn, 2010), that it is the job of professional researchers only (Canh, 2018), and that it has little effect on teachers' career promotion and employment (Pham, 2006) are some reasons why most Vietnamese teachers lack intrinsic motivation to embark on AR.

Drawing on an ecological framework encapsulating four categories (*actors, relationships, environments and structures, and processes*) proposed by Weaver-Hightower (2008), this study investigates how EFL teachers' professional identities were formed and reformed over the course of their AR experiences. Accordingly, the study aims to address this question: *How does doing AR affect EFL teachers' perceived professional identity construction and reconstruction?* To answer this question, the scope of inquiry is deliberately restricted to how teachers perceive themselves as teacher-researchers, both in the classroom and in their professional community, rather than looks empirically into all of the individual and contextual factors impacting their professional identity construction and reconstruction.

2. Literature review

2.1 Teachers' Professional Identity Construction and Reconstruction

Teachers' professional identity relates directly to how they define their professional roles (Lasky, 2005; Goodson & Cole, 1994; Kelchtermans, 1993) and to what they consider to be important for their teaching career (van Veen & Slegers, 2006; van Veen, Slegers, Bergen, & Klaassen, 2001). Recent studies have described teachers' professional identity construction and reconstruction as a long-term, underexplored process of teachers constructing and reconstructing their professional identities (Tsui, 2007; Xun & Zheng, 2014). This process might never cease (Danielewicz, 2001; Gray & Seiki, 2020; Taylor, 2017; Zembylas, 2003), and its dynamics span the teachers' entire career (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). That said, at a particular stage of their teaching career, due to various external and internal reasons, the construction and reconstruction of their professional identity could become 'fossilized'; however, this stage does not mean it could not be open to change (Olsen, 2016; Trent, 2011). This process includes multifarious aspects (Cooper & Olson, 1996), which means several

contextual factors could influence the construction and reconstruction process of teachers' professional identity (Mockler, 2011), from family background and past career experience (Barrett, 2008; Davin, Chavoshan, & Donato, 2018; Flores & Day, 2006; Gray & Seiki, 2020; Mockler, 2011), emotions or emotional experiences (Chen, 2019; Gaines et al., 2019; Hulburt, Colaianneand & Roeser, 2020; Song, 2016; Yazan & Peercy, 2016; Zembylas, 2003), and various social categories, such as race, ethnicity, gender, attitudes, beliefs, desires, values, ideologies, interactions, and relationships (Ayinselya, 2020; Bukor, 2015; Farrell, 2011; Holland & Lachicotte, 2007).

Contextual mediators that could affect teachers' professional identity construction and reconstruction were first mentioned in Reynolds (1996), who emphasized that the teachers' surroundings, other individuals' expectations, and what teachers allow to have an impact on them would significantly influence their professional identities. According to Reynolds, teachers' workplace could be a persuasive, demanding, and often restrictive landscape. In a more recent study by De Costa and Norton (2017), neoliberal demands and globalized settings are also viewed as modern factors that would considerably impact teacher identity construction and reconstruction.

Agency, an individual's ability to adjust or change a pre-existing condition or situation (Giddens, 1984) or power (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Miller, 2009), is another factor that contributes to teachers' professional identity construction and reconstruction (Kayi-Aydar, 2018). Teachers might or might not be able to exercise agency in order to respond to external factors, which might enforce their established identities or construct their desired ones. If they are given the power to make a difference in their teaching context, their identity reconstruction is likely to occur. On the other hand, in case teachers are unable to contribute to the change or adjustment of their teaching context or to be aware of their own identity as a teacher, or in case the identity self-reflection process is discontinued, it might result in their rigid, unchangeable teacher identity.

2.2 Roles of Teachers Inside and Outside the Classroom

Brown (2007) summarized five main roles of teachers in the language classroom: controller, director, manager, facilitator, and resources, ordering from most directive to least directive roles. Harrison and Killion (2007) expanded the notion, adding ten more roles of teachers as leaders (e.g., resource provider, instructional specialist, curriculum specialist, classroom supporter, learning facilitator, mentor, school leader, data coach, and learner) by putting it outside the classroom context. Teachers could practice their leadership through performing their extramural responsibilities as a teacher and professional interactions with their colleagues. Based on Harrison and Killion's notion of teacher roles, with the study by Quoc et al. (2021) highlighting teaches' role as learning facilitators and coaches in teaching English pronunciation as an example, it is realistic for teachers to embark on and seriously pursue their research career in order to be effective facilitators or resources in the classroom, as well as to take leading roles outside the classroom.

2.3 Action Research

McNiff and Whitehead (2010) explain the definition of AR in two aspects: *action* (the doing) and *research* (the methodology and explanation of the doing). Action is defined as a process whose purpose is to improve practice, therefore improving learning and also influencing thinking and behaviors, while *research* was about creating knowledge about the practice. In the scope of this study, AR is referred to as a type of classroom research (Cain, 2011; Wallace, 1998) or an action-driven and interventional approach to research (Burns, 2009) that requires collaboration as an essential condition (Aldridge et al., 2020; Borg, 2013; Burns, 2009, 2010).

AR in the field of language teaching is rooted in a teacher-researcher movement (Borg, 2013; Burns, 2010; Crook, 1993; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; Wallace, 1998), which has contributed to shortening the distance between research theories and practice (Canh, 2018; Crookes, 1993; Johnson, 2002). The focus of educational AR is not on finding what is wrong but more on how to improve the practice of teaching and learning (Eileen, 2000; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010).

2.4 Action Research and Teachers' Researcher Identity

It is essential to understand language teachers' researcher identity - how they perceive themselves as researchers - since it has a great impact on the manifestation of their sense of agency, their autonomy development, and their professional development (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000; Hong, 2010). In the language education field, considerable attention has been paid to teachers' research engagement (Borg, 2009), particularly in higher educational institutions, as the performance of teachers has become an essential factor for recruitment, job security, job evaluation, and promotion (Bai & Millwater, 2011; Canh, 2018; Fox, 2020). Associating research with identity, Taylor (2017) and Trent (2012) claimed that engaging in conducting provides language teachers with opportunities for professional development and a sense of empowerment.

Several studies (e.g., Borg, 2006; Burns, 2000, 2015; Connelly & Hughes-Stanton, 2020; Edward & Burns, 2016a, 2016b; Fox, 2020; Long & Huang, 2017; Trent, 2020; Xiang, 2019) explored the influence of individual factors and contextual factors on teachers' professional identity construction and reconstruction. Their common finding was that contextual factors had a more prominent impact on teachers' motivation to conduct AR. A more recent study by Tran, Burns, and Ollerhead (2017) found that in a university context in Vietnam, language teachers were faced with tensions and challenges while trying to meet their institutions' new demands for them to partake in doing research besides teaching without any institutional support or mentorship having provided for them beforehand. Some gave positive responses towards the requirements and showed confidence in their research abilities and potentials. At the same time, other teachers were put under great pressure and were discouraged due to a lack of confidence in their capacity to achieve research goals. However, despite the previous findings on the connection between doing AR and teachers' professional identity, the impact of doing AR on how EFL teachers perceive themselves in their professional roles remains unclear.

3. Theoretical Framework for Analysis

Given the complex interplay of individual and contextual factors that shape EFL teachers' research engagement and the construction and reconstruction of their professional identities, the ecological perspective framework proposed by Weaver-Hightower (2008) will provide a helpful lens through which to answer the research question of this study. Weaver-Hightower applied a four-part metaphor of ecological elements in this framework, including *actors*, *relationships*, *environments and structures*, and *processes*.

- *Actors*: Actors are the individuals and groups in an ecosystem of schools and school systems that function in many roles, sometimes simultaneously. An apparent example is teachers, who need to play a variety of roles in their classrooms, sometimes with more than one role at a time.
- *Relationships*: Actors interact with each other and establish *relationships*, which may involve collaboration to achieve a shared goal, such as adapting a curriculum. *Relationships* take two forms: actors compete for similar interests (*competition*) and coexist without noticeable collaboration or support or predatory relationships in which policies negatively affect educational programs or funds being used for other purposes (*symbiosis*).
- *Environments and structures*: Environments and structures (e.g., school context, educational policies), which are impacted by social, historical, cultural, and economic conditions, affect actors and their relationships. When the context puts pressures (changes) on individuals or groups, they respond in different ways, adapt themselves to specific roles required by structures and traditions, and show different levels of effectiveness as they change or enhance the functioning of the ecosystem.
- *Processes*: Many processes are invoked that can keep an ecosystem sustainable, but these may also make the system become chaotic and collapse or even lead to the establishment of a new system. To prevent possible chaos, *actors* may use resources from the ecosystem to pre-empt breakdown, anticipate future needs, and adapt to meet the new requirements.

Given their ecologically interlacing nature, these components are instrumental in unveiling the complex interplay among many variables such as personal experience, knowledge, values, schooling practices, and institutional values, justifying themselves as an appropriate backdrop against which this study's participants' AR engagement and professional identity dynamics are analyzed.

4. Methodology

4.1 Method

A narrative approach was adopted to answer the research question of this study. As an effective social science research approach, narrative research has been commonly used in collecting research data associated with identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2011) view narrative research as “the study of how different humans experience the world around them” (p. 400), also emphasize the relation between the development of narrative research on teacher research and AR trends over the last decade.

As the most common source of narrative data (Bold, 2012; Chase, 2011), semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted to thoroughly scrutinize the participants' experiences. Ten close-ended and open-ended questions were prepared based on the literature and the theoretical framework reviewed above (Appendix A1). The questions focused on two main aspects: (1) teachers' teaching experiences before and after doing AR and (2) their experiences in doing AR from the beginning until the time they were interviewed. Follow-up questions were made based on the participants' answers to the guiding questions to elicit more details and/or clarify the given information.

This study also adopted restorying and storytelling, two distinctive techniques commonly used in narrative research (Gay et al., 2011). Restorying, as defined by Creswell (2012), is “the process in which the research gathers stories, analyzes them for key elements of the story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewrite the story to place it in a chronological sequence.” (p. 509). Besides engaging in interviews in informal settings such as coffee shops and the teacher's breakroom, due to one participants' preference, storytelling was used when participants did not prefer the use of an audio recorder. In such cases, field notes were recorded after the conversations. This technique is essential to collect the data that could provide a closer look at the participants' works and explain why they did what they did during the AR (Gay et al., 2011).

4.2 Participants

The target participants of this were four Vietnamese EFL in-service teachers who had done or are doing at least one AR study during their teaching career. The context of the study was based in a large city in southeastern Vietnam, where Nam and Lan (pseudonyms) teach for a large privately-owned English language center while Hoa and Thanh are lecturers at a public university. These institutions set high standards for their teaching staff, thus offering copious opportunities for continued professional development such as weekly teacher professional development seminars and favorable conditions for doing research for publication. The demographics of these participants are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Background Information of the Participants

Name	Gender	Title	Years of teaching experience	Education Qualification	Research Area
Nam	Male	Full-time Teacher	7	MA in English language education	English language education
Lan	Female	Full-time Teacher	8	MA in English language education	English Language education
Hoa	Female	Full-time Lecturer	10	MA in English language education	English Language education
Thanh	Female	Full-time Lecturer	12	MA in English language education	English Language education

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Two semi-structures were conducted with Nam (18 minutes), two with Lan (25 minutes), one with Hoa (46 minutes), and one with Thanh (60 minutes). These interviews focused on their experiences in conducting AR from before they started their first research to the time they were interviewed.

The audios and footnotes were transcribed in full to avoid any bias arising as a result of selective transcription. The transcripts were subsequently sent to the participants for verification and feedback. Each transcript was then analyzed based on the key elements described in the theoretical framework and the themes related to the stages of the AR process (pre-AR, while-AR, and post-AR) highlighted. This makes allowance for retelling the participants' AR experiences in chronological sequence, including their educational and professional backgrounds, involved characters, reasons why they did, what they did, the obstacles and solutions during the process, how they applied the findings in their teaching context, plans, and possible changes in the way they identified themselves, and their classroom practice.

Subsequently, the participants were asked to write a narrative which was then used to confirm the interview data. The narratives were analyzed, using the partially ordered meta-matrix suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). The characteristics of the teachers' professional identity were identified based on their professional life cycle (Huberman, 1989, 1993), the three stages of research identified by Long and Huang (2017, and Weaver-Hightower's (2008) framework.

5. Results

The data indicated that all four participants exhibited a more positive attitude towards both teaching and research after conducting AR. Compared to the pre-research stage, the participants' enjoyment of and commitment to their teaching career were intensified. Also, their awareness of the teacher roles they play inside and outside the classroom has been changed dramatically. By getting engaged in AR, the four participants' confidence in their teaching and research skills, despite individual and contextual obstacles, was augmented, and all of them perceived doing AR to be a necessary and beneficial professional development activity. In what follows, the teachers' perceptions will be presented in tandem with each stage of the AR process.

5.1 The Pre-research Stage

It was found that at this stage, two factors, namely *actors* and *environment and structures*, appear to dominate the construction of the four teachers' professional identities. As they reported, their motivation to engage in conducting AR is rooted in their personal observation and self-reflection process of their own teaching practices.

In all cases, the teachers reported their need to improve their teaching competence to find solutions to the classroom problems they faced, which motivated them to conduct AR, even though they were not aware of the AR concept. Lan, for example, reported that she desired to be a *good teacher*, but her previous poor performance in teaching writing contradicted this identity. Despite this contradiction resulting in her disappointment in herself, it fueled her proclivity for doing AR to improve her teaching.

I know that my responsibilities as a teacher are significant, so I've put a lot of pressure on myself like I have to do this and that to be a good teacher, so when I fail to help my students improve their writing skills after a course, I blame myself a lot. I consider two writing courses as my failures, I still remember them until now, and I feel really guilty. That's a motivation for me to find ways to improve my teaching. So I did small-scale research, a small study, and then found a more effective way to correct students' mistakes. (Excerpt 1: Lan)

Identifying with Lan, the other teachers commented that they enjoyed teaching and had a strong passion for their career, but they also encountered lots of difficulties that inhibited their *good teacher* identity. Nam described himself as a traditional teacher who would just complete his normal teaching routine on a daily basis, while Thanh identified herself as a responsible teacher after struggling with how to teach a young learner class in her teacher training course. Similarly, Hoa was concerned about what she called "*ethical values*" of the teaching profession: how to help her students become fluent English speakers. What stands out from these teachers' perceptions is that the question of how to teach better strongly motivated them to find ways to become a better version of themselves, and one of the ways they realized was to turn to AR.

Another common perception among the teachers is that *a supportive institutional environment*

inspired them to be more dedicated to their teaching profession and professional development, which is a significant source of motivation for them to conduct AR. Alluding to this matter, Hoa, for example, said:

I love teaching, and I want to have a stable job. As a woman, I don't have any ambition to climb any career ladder; that's why I choose to work for X University. I think we have a good chance there to work with the professional lecturers to gain more experience, not only about teaching but doing research as well. If I don't work there, I would say that maybe I haven't got any chance to improve my research ability. (Excerpt 2: Hoa)

It can be seen that, although Hoa does not have a strong initial motivation for developing herself professionally, her engagement with more competent and experienced colleagues at her school has allowed her to take her teaching abilities to a different level, and more importantly, this has strengthened her belief in her ability as a researcher. Obviously, institutional support is a driving force for even the least motivated teachers such as Hoa to reimagine themselves in their academic profession. Sharing this perception, Thanh commented that the knowledge and skills in the area of English pedagogy she gained from her undergraduate English teaching program and her language center's institutional training program allowed her to conduct her first-ever AR study as part of her graduation thesis.

Despite not standing out in the data, *relationships* were reported to contribute to the teachers' commitment to teaching. Personal relationships such as family and friends, for instance, were the reason behind Lan and Hoa's decision to embark on teaching. In Thanh's case, she was encouraged to switch from a business-related job to a teaching career by her training program mentor, who recognized her strong English competence.

5.2 The While-research Stage

All four participants expressed their concerns about carrying out their first AR study without being fully aware of what AR truly involves. Even after being introduced to the concept of research in general and AR in particular, they reported a certain level of anxiety and a lack of self-confidence in their research capacity. Excerpts 3 and 4 illustrate their *bewildered selves*.

Honestly (AR is) just a thing that I couldn't do because something related to research really is a big problem not only for me but also for my classmates. And, you know, the name is so big, and we didn't know how to do it. (Excerpt 3: Nam)

It took me a lot of energy. I would say that some kind of mental problems like headache and stress and pressure... because I didn't do research for my Bachelor's degree. (Excerpt 4: Hoa)

Regardless of the teachers' reported pressure, their *relationships* once again played an important role in promoting their AR engagement. While conducting AR, they received considerable spiritual and academic support from their mentors, which augmented their teaching capacity and positively influenced their disposition toward AR. Excerpt 4 below illustrates key points expressed.

She [her mentor] had a great impact on my teaching career. She was oriented and helped me know the right teaching methods since she's an experienced teacher trainer. From theories, she also instructed me how to apply those to the real teaching context and showed me many other things, so I learned a lot from her. Since I've been guided by her, teaching has become easier compared to before I knew her... (Since then) I got a general idea of doing research mostly thanks to my mentor, and as you can see, the way I want to conduct research is influenced by her a lot. (Excerpt 4: Thanh)

However, *relationships* with dispassionate colleagues tended to be an inhibitor for the four teachers developing their research profession, but they tended to remain their interest. Extract 5 demonstrates how the lack of cooperation and encouragement from other teaching staff made Lan want to withdraw from AR and intensified her self-restraint.

In some AR, we need cooperation, and we need maybe 2 or 3 teachers. Doing alone makes me sometimes depressed or disappointed when I don't know what to do next. So I need some kind of support from the others, but now I'm just doing it alone because I think it is quite new in the center context... I tried to suggest some teachers try the teaching method I've done for my classes, but they rejected it because their schedules and teaching contexts are different from mine, so now I don't really want to share my research findings... Maybe (that is) because of my style, I'm kind of introverted. I'd better do something on my own. (Excerpt 5: Lan)

In the face of such an inhibitor, the teachers expressed their desire to reconnect with their former professors in their graduate programs as they thought such connections would make their AR continue to be a reality.

In terms of *institutional environments* and *processes*, despite the teachers receiving methodological support from their graduate programs, they encountered some obstacles in the process of doing AR. Lan, for instance, could not control the number of students coming to her class at a private English center as their attendance was not compulsory. For Nam and Hoa, there were two difficulties: his huge teaching load draining much of his energy and his lack of access to relevant literature resources due to journals' close access policy. In addition, Thanh was reluctant to publish her research in the journal of her school as she did not need institutional recognition, while Hoa worried about not being able to meet the requirements of top-tier publishers. These institutional factors, in a way, interfered with the teachers' researcher identity construction while they were short of coping strategies.

5.3 The Post-research Stage

Most noticeable in this AR stage was the change in the teachers' professional identities. All the four participants became more aware of their role as a *facilitator* in the classroom and also developed their identities as *research-orientated teachers* with enhanced confidence in conducting classroom AR.

Since her AR study received positive feedback, Lan found it much more enjoyable to teach her

writing classes. Having applied her findings in several courses, she became increasingly confident in the positive effects of her AR on her students' writing development. She was also positive about her new role as a *teacher-researcher* and believed strongly in the necessity of AR; however, she identified herself more as a teacher than as a researcher and showed no desire to pursue AR seriously. She said:

I still love teaching. So I think I just do action research for my class. I don't want to become a professional researcher. (Excerpt 6: Lan).

After his AR-based Master's thesis, Nam better understood his duty as a teacher. He recognized that what he should do is not only lecturing but also flexibly adapting himself to the requirements of his teaching context. He described himself as a *facilitator* in the classroom, where he adjusted his teaching to meet students' on-the-spot needs instead of controlling their learning process based on a pre-determined curriculum. Noticeably, his AR intensified his aspiration for teaching and researching, as he put it:

So maybe I can say that I am ambitious enough to be a mentor, but it's a long way to go. (Excerpt 7: Nam).

Maybe this is just an example, 30% for teaching and 70% for doing research. I think that's suitable for me. (Excerpt 8: Nam).

Similarly, Hoa became more confident in selecting teaching techniques and classroom activities to better support her students' learning, and her classes became more student-centered than before her research. Furthermore, there was an increase in her confidence and interest in conducting AR; she gained a better knowledge of what she called "*better measurements*" for making her research "*more scientific and logical.*"

Among the four participants, Thanh most clearly identified herself as an *action researcher*. She affirmed the importance of doing AR for her professional development and demonstrated a strong desire to become a *better researcher*. She did this by finding ways to upgrade the quality of her research and reconnecting with expert researchers in the field. Excerpt 9 illustrates how she planned for the advancement of her imagined identity.

I've just finished writing a research paper for another AR I did in my university class, but I don't want to publish it just yet. Next year, I will repeat that research on a larger scale; then, maybe I will submit my paper to a renowned journal... I'm also reconnecting with those expert researchers... I want to invest more in researching for my own professional development". (Excerpt 9: Thanh)

Despite the teachers positively perceiving the importance of AR, they reported that the lack of enthusiasm from their colleagues and excessive teaching are two *institutional factors* inhibiting their engagement with AR. They, however, were hopeful for a future where doing research will become a mandatory program in higher education institutions. Hoa, for instance, stressed this by saying, "*... for some prestigious universities, the main role of lecturers is doing research*". (Excerpt 10: Hoa).

6. Discussion

6.1 Conducting AR and Teachers' Professional Identities

When teachers are in the early stage of their teaching career, oftentimes, they are not fully aware of the demands and expectations from their students, their academic community (Huberman, 1989). This is true of the study's four teachers in their pre-research stage, when their professional identity was limited to the basic agenda they were supposed to perform in their classroom, including delivering lectures and assessing students' learning outcomes. This is illustrated by their labeling their teacher role as traditional. Regarding AR, none of the teachers showed a thorough understanding of research methodology, nor were they conscious of the value of conducting AR towards their teaching profession.

Since it was not until 2008 that AR was introduced to Vietnamese EFL teachers through the *National Foreign Languages Project 2020* and in-service teacher training courses served in-service teachers only (Le, 2018), none of the four participants had the chance to get familiar with the concept in their undergraduate programs. During their first year of teaching, they faced real classroom problems and were concerned about their pedagogical capabilities, which urged them to take action. To pursue their professional identities as more capable teachers, they enrolled in a graduate TESOL program in which they sought to attend one-off professional development agenda workshops where AR was introduced. It can be seen, therefore, that their instrumental motivation was the driving force for them to find ways to construct their desired professional identities: teacher identity (Kayi-Aydar, 2018; Reynolds, 1996) and researcher identity (Beijaard et al., 2000; Hong, 2010).

In their while-research stage, all the teachers conducted AR as a compulsory component in the same graduate program they partook in. Despite their different stories in conducting AR, all of them experienced a similar change in their teacher identities, from *traditional teachers* to *classroom facilitators*, with their methods of teaching shifted from teacher-centered to student-centered. They reported that having gained a deeper understanding of research methodology and AR, they saw considerable increases in their confidence in teaching and researching. They accordingly identified themselves as *teacher researchers* and were determined that becoming *expert researchers* is their long-term goal. The teachers' sense of empowerment in their careers was indeed heightened by their engagement in conducting AR (Taylor, 2017; Trent, 2012). In addition, the teachers' willingness to continue conducting AR was enforced by the sufficient input about research methodology they received through their graduate programs, workshops, and conventions. The good rapport and support from their mentors also played an important part in encouraging them to continue doing AR, although the lack of cooperation from colleagues was a demotivator. This echoes the claim of Edward and Burns (2016a) that relationships between teachers and their superiors, managers, and colleagues need to be negotiated so that their sense of agency can be achieved and that the teachers' researcher identity can be recognized in their academic community.

According to the findings, during the three stages of conducting research, the four teachers

changed their view of the roles they play in and outside the classroom and the relationship between teaching and conducting AR. All of them acknowledged the importance of AR to their professional development. That is, they could successfully apply their AR findings in their teaching context to make a difference in their own teaching. However, there is a slight difference between their *researcher identities*. Nam, Hoa, and Thanh had a strong interest in research and publication, thus making efforts to enhance their research ability to advance in their research profession as *educational research experts*. Meanwhile, Lan had a profound passion for teaching and AR but took little interest in writing and publishing. It could be seen that she considered AR just as a tool for her to realize her identity as *a competent EFL teacher*.

6.2 Teachers' Professional Identities from an Ecological Perspective

The transformation of the professional identities of the four participants during their three stages of conducting AR indicated that a teacher's professional identity is affected by various individual factors and social factors. From an ecological perspective (Weaver-Hightower, 2008), throughout the three stages of conducting AR, the four factors, namely *actors*, *relationships*, *environments and structures*, and *processes*, were shown to intertwine with one another to both facilitate and constrain the teachers' professional identity construction and reconstruction.

In this study, the four EFL teachers played the role of the main *actors*. They had *relationships* with superiors and colleagues (other actors) in their *professional environments*, where the *institutional structure* impacted their teaching (e.g., classroom context, academic and non-academic duties), the national educational policies (e.g., National Foreign Languages Project 2020), and *social conditions* (e.g., increasing investment in language education and Vietnam's demand of EFL teachers with advanced proficiency). The pressure from their professional environments caused them to pursue a graduate qualification (Master's degrees) and conduct AR, which subsequently transformed their professional identities. This identity reconstruction process also changed their points of view about the roles they play as EFL teachers to adapt to institutional and social expectations and demands and the value of AR in their professional development.

6.2.1 Actors

As mentioned above, in the pre-research stage, the four participants' perception of their professional identities involved only the basic agenda an average teacher needs to do in the classroom, with teaching being their main responsibility. They were not concerned about other roles they were expected to perform in their teaching community, and doing research was simply beyond their abilities. Their perception of teachers' duties was rooted in their past learning experiences in which they observed the practices of their teachers. From the ecological perspective of Weaver-Hightower (2008), the relationship between *actors*, the participants, and their teachers, in this case, left them with a strong impression of the basic role of language teachers in the classroom. Such impression could be considered as a key factor for the construction of their initial professional identities.

Interestingly, the four teachers' choice of teaching as their lifetime career was clearly influenced by other *actors* in their personal or semi-professional environments. Lan and Nam's belief in their teaching potential was enforced with positive feedback from the students they were tutoring, while Thanh turned to the teaching profession because of the encouragement from her superiors. For Hoa, she embarked on her undergraduate program in English teaching with great moral support from her family. This could be considered the first cycle of constructing the teachers' professional identities where they (*actors*) responded to the positive pressure from *other actors* by taking concrete action (*processes*).

6.2.2 *Environments and Structures*

In their undergraduate programs in English teaching, the teachers were trained in the area of teaching methods and techniques; still, they remained unaware of what was ahead once they entered the real world of teaching. Although they strongly desired to become competent English teachers, their hands-on experiences in this real-world allowed them to see their deficits while simultaneously encouraging them to seriously pursue a better qualification and participate in professional development activities. Lan and Nam were faced with classroom problems they were unable to solve due to their limited pedagogical knowledge and experience. Meanwhile, Hoa and Thanh struggled with the academic pressure from their position as university lecturers. Evidently, *environments and structures*, the teachers' career challenges, and their schools' policy, in this case, made them change themselves for the better by going through *processes*. These extrinsic factors motivated them to start their Master's studies and conduct AR, thus turning their *traditional teacher identity* into *researcher identity* (Long & Huang, 2017).

The institutional and social environments provided the teachers with favorable conditions to study and do AR. They received support from their institutions, such as flexible schedules to participate in their graduate program and permission and classroom conditions to conduct their research. This reflects the claim that teachers are more likely to do research if they are given opportunities and favorable conditions to put their knowledge into practice (Borg & Sanchez, 2014). In addition, the top-down educational policies such as National Foreign Languages Project 2020 made teachers more aware of the urgent need to improve themselves, which further fueled their pursuit of graduate education and professional development activities such as training workshops.

The institutional academic context facilitated the teachers' professional identity construction and reconstruction. They gained necessary knowledge of pedagogy from their graduate TESOL program and workshops and research and also the support from senior researchers in conducting and publishing their research, confirming the positive influences of graduate studies on the evolution of teachers' professional identity (Shahri, 2018; Steadman et al., 2018; Yazan, 2017). Despite their initial lack of research experience, these favorable conditions enabled them to uncover and sharpen their research capabilities, have more freedom to conduct AR, translate their findings into classroom teaching, and, most importantly, construct their researcher identity. Their increased sense of agency helped them build up confidence in teaching and encouraged them to perform other professional roles both in and outside the classroom. This corroborates

the positive correlation between active engagement in research and teachers' professional identities (Borg, 2006; Burn, 2000, 2015; Edward & Burns, 2016a, 2016b; Smith Connelly, & Rebolledo, 2014)

On the other hand, some difficulties remain in their institutions and the broader academic context in Vietnam that the teachers have to grapple with. Demanding workloads are the most commonly mentioned obstacle among the four teachers. Although they could still manage to do AR, it was hard for them to balance their teaching, research, and personal lives. Regarding the academic context in Vietnam, because of few local educational journals and closed access to well-known journals (Le, 2018) and a lack of social connections with high-profile researchers, the teachers considered publishing in prestigious international journals as a great challenge. This was a major inhibitor for their research engagement and publication, which limited the scope and quality of their research to an institutional level. Notwithstanding these barriers, almost all of the four participants indicated their intention to persist in pursuing AR but for their own classroom teaching purposes, which demonstrates that teachers' internal attributes, including internal motivation, play a crucial part in their resilience in the face of abundant hindrances (Araghian & Ghanizadeh, 2021).

The participants (Hoa and Thanh) were dissatisfied with the research culture of their academic community. Hoa's expectation for AR to become compulsory in her institutional context and for more time for research rather than for teaching only was not met. In Thanh's case, since her perception and her institution's about AR and its values were mismatched, she had to seek support from a more professional research community. Unfortunately, all the four teachers could not seek connections and support from external research experts after their graduate program, and the number of one-off training courses, workshops, conferences, or conventions was extremely limited in their context. Such a lack of bottom-up professional support and training might trigger a feeling of isolation, confusion, and even vexation, all that the Vietnamese teachers in Vu, Winsler, and Walsh (2020) also experienced when faced with the misalignment between top-down curriculum reforms and their insufficient preparations to adapt. That deficiency was another major demotivator for the teachers' research engagement in this study, which hindered their researcher identity construction.

6.2.3 Relationships

Relationships greatly impacted the four teachers' professional identities (Edward & Burns, 2016a, 2016b; Long & Huang, 2017). They received moral support to conduct AR and the recognition of their researcher identity from their mentors, senior researchers, and office superiors. The encouragement from office superiors is one of the most prominent reasons why Lan and Nam were willing to continue doing AR after their Master's thesis, despite their workload and difficulties in approaching literature. Likewise, connections with supportive mentors and supervisors and acknowledging their researcher identity and research capabilities from superiors gave Hoa and Thanh enough confidence to persist in becoming expert researchers. However, they need to constantly seek a balance between their roles as EFL teachers and researchers.

According to Edwards and Burns (2016a), conflicts and unsupportiveness in a professional community might cause stagnation to teachers' research professionals affecting their professional development, both teachers and researchers. In this study, the teacher's relationship with their colleagues regarding the research profession was not positive as none of them reported being motivated to conduct AR by these people. Lan and Nam, for instance, were discouraged by the lack of acknowledgment, participation, and moral support from other teachers in their institutions. This led them to isolate themselves from their colleagues; Lan refused to share her research findings publicly, and John preferred to conduct AR independently rather than seeking peer cooperation in this endeavor.

6.2.4 Processes

The findings showed that the entire process of doing AR affected their classroom practice and their students' learning experiences on an ongoing basis. Having gained some AR experience, the four teachers' perception of their classroom roles was switched from traditional lecture-style teachers to facilitators and teacher-researchers. Their pedagogical approach shifted from teacher-centered to student-centered, evidenced by their efforts to increasingly engage students in their lessons and take less control over students' learning progress than before. Their students welcomed this revolutionary change as they reported positive feedback, better participation, and improvements in their students' learning outcomes. Thanks to their research findings, the teachers believed strongly in their chosen teaching methods, therefore, promoting their positive attitude towards teaching and researching. These developments echoed the positive perception of Saudi Arabian teachers in Assalahi (2021), who also strongly agreed that professional development is key to improvements in teaching and students' learning. Last but not least, such pronounced success earned the teachers recognition for their teaching and researching capacity and became a source of motivation for junior colleagues in their professional community to embark on the AR journey. Their AR process paved the way for others to commence, it appears.

7. Conclusion and Suggestions

The study investigated how four Vietnamese EFL teachers reconstructed their teacher identities and constructed their researcher identities throughout the three stages of doing AR. Based on the teachers' narrations of their teaching and AR experience, overall, it was found that conducting action research positively affected their professional identity construction and reconstruction, but with the complex interplay of several individuals, institutional, academic, and social factors in Weaver-Hightower's (2008) ecological framework. *Environments and structures*, including institutional, academic, and social contexts, had significant impacts on the teachers' research engagement, which indirectly transformed their professional identities. *Relationships* between the teachers and their colleagues, office superiors, and senior researchers also played an important role in constructing and reconstructing their professional identities. These findings extend the existing literature on teachers' professional identity by answering the question of how conducting AR influences teachers' perceived professional identity

construction and reconstruction in an EFL context like Vietnam.

Accordingly, these findings above provide implications for EFL teachers and educational institutions in EFL contexts. Teachers should be more aware of AR and its potential contributions to their professional lives. To better themselves as teachers, they should invest their time not only in teaching but also in seeking higher education in pedagogy and research methodology so that they can conduct AR in their teaching context. They should also actively participate in one-off training courses, conferences, and workshops to get more input on research methodology and to establish connections with research experts in the field and extend their research profession. Educational institutions should focus on promoting their teachers' research engagement by providing them with opportunities and favorable conditions for their AR projects. Teacher preparation programs should be customized to meet teachers' specific needs for how to deal with specific classroom problems they might encounter in the future. In this respect, Assalahi (2021) calls for the creation and application of standards that "enable[d] teachers in identifying their priorities in terms of their competencies, the preferred PD types, constraints and enablers of PD and based on this, they can choose the suitable PD type (formal or informal) to address these needs". Additionally, to help teachers publish research papers in top-tier journals, educational institutions could create opportunities for them to network with senior researchers and experts in the field.

Beyond the scope of this study are social categories such as gender, age, ethnicity, ideologies that could be examined in further research about the connection between teachers' professional identity and AR. Neoliberal demands and globalized settings (De Costa & Norton, 2017), if included, could also throw more light on the issue. What is more, since the study reported the lack of collaboration between teachers for AR, investigating the dynamics of collaborative AR, especially how it shapes teachers' professional identities, is a potential topic for future studies.

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The impacts of motivation and task types on L2 oral fluency development in higher education in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: oral fluency, task types, motivation

This study was conducted to investigate the impacts of motivation and task types on the development of L2 oral fluency in higher education in Vietnam. The quantitative method was employed to achieve this goal. The participants were thirteen teachers and thirty second-year students at the university. Questionnaires with close items for students and instructors and semi-structured interview questions for instructors were employed as data collection instruments. The results suggested that teachers consider that a student would be successful with proper motivation and the task success is just being motivated. In addition, the findings reveal that performance is, in general, statistically more fluent in dialogue but also indicate that performances in the two modes are not different. This article is a part of my dissertation project, which examines teachers and students' perspectives on the factors influencing the oral fluency of L2 students in universities in Vietnam.

Introduction

A language is a form of communication that allows people to exchange ideas, information, and feelings with one another. In this respect, English is the language that links everyone from many cultures, beliefs, and countries together. "English is increasingly being used as a medium for interactions among nonnative speakers," Brown and Lee (2015, p. 163). Speaking, believed by Chastain (1988), is "a vital factor in developing each language competence and imparting culture knowledge" (p. 271). Thus, speaking appears to be the most significant of the four language skills in communication (Candilas, 2021; Pabro-Maquidato, 2021; Su et al., 2021; Teh, 2021; Tran, 2021; Zaremba, 2006). Similarly, Kormos and Dénes (2004) indicate that the primary objective of a foreign or second language learner is to communicate and transmit the target language fluently and accurately (Chau, 2021; Teh, 2021). Given the importance of accuracy, more emphasis is placed on fluency in attaining

communicative goals in interactions.

In some senses, fluency in English as a foreign language refers to a single, apparently isolatable aspect of oral skill. Beardsmore (1972) defined "oral fluency is understood to imply a 'communicative competence' requiring an ability to formulate accurate and appropriate utterances of more than one sentence in length" (p.10). This means that oral fluency goes hand in hand with accuracy. On the other hand, according to Richards (2006), fluency is the use of naturally occurring language by a speaker when engaging in and maintaining meaningful communication. Despite limitations in one's verbal competence, this dialogue would be understandable and continuous.

Given that the higher education level is more like to be the final stage of the L2 learning in one's life, particularly in the EFL courses where English language subject is officially learned, the findings of this study hope to highlight the specific factors influencing L2 oral fluency that the L2 learners could have in the process of the learning stage. It attracts many researchers around the world to conduct an investigation (Chau, 2021). Additionally, the results might empirically demonstrate how far learners have been affected by possible factors in learning spoken English.

Literature Review

Motivation in language learning and speaking fluency

Motivation is believed as a property of the learner, but it is also a controversial concept. Also, it has been good evidence to support that L2 motivation could refer to the various purposes, not least of which is part of learning a second language. In broad terms, L2 motivation can be described as any stimulus that constitutes successful second-language speakers by planting in them the seeds of self-confidence and escalating momentum of sustaining the long-term learning process (Dörnyei, Z, 1998; Abda, 2017). Alternatively, Gardner (1985, p.10 cited in Dörnyei, Z, 1998) states that L2 motivation is defined as "the extent to which individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity." Arising out of this, L2 motivation is made up of three elements: motivational intensity, a desire to learn the language, and an attitude toward the process of learning the language. Otherwise, its most universal acceptance is divided into extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Lewis, 2002), which should be conceptualized as contributing to the essential role in stimulating students to fix on their learning process.

According to the logical theory that things are changing in their intrinsic motivation, Heyun (1999) described LOF growth from self-willed motivation based on Levelt's speaking model, Anderson's Adaptive Control of Thought, and de Bot's second language model. The study explored the connection between self-willed motivation and a few other characteristics. Finally, the author stated that self-willed motivation is an original motivation in oral fluency and learning a second language. In addition, Le (2001) added that it is worth considering that "learners' needs vary, depending on external exposure to the target language and personal

motivation” (p.35). In other words, students who are motivated to talk are more effective in increasing their speaking skills, and students who are not motivated are less successful in achieving their speaking skills. As a result, one of the factors affecting students' English speaking skills in the classroom is motivation.

Task types and oral fluency

Regarding task type, according to much recent research, tasks have an essential role in our knowledge of second language performance as well as the effectiveness of education. That way, task types would contain everything needed for sustained second language development (Skehan, Xiaoyue, Qian, & Wang, 2012). Considering the great importance of task types to the learners' speaking performance, Skehan (2009c) offered a different perspective on the impact of interactive tasks on performance, claiming that speaking with an interlocutor may make it more crucial for the speaker to use exact language and avoid making mistakes. In other regards, the involvement of an interlocutor helps to provide more specific information may result in increased fluency and accuracy. Similarly, the study by Bosker et al. (2014) measured fluency in terms of topic. According to their findings, a speaker's ability to talk fluently is influenced by the topic they choose. In fact, they discovered that a more challenging topic encourages people to communicate more eloquently.

In second language acquisition (SLA) research, Dörnyei (2002) proposed that task motivation might not just be a composite of relatively stable trait and state task-related motivation but also a dynamic process called motivational task processing. With the help of this task processing system, L2 learners analyze the provided learning task, perform it, and employ action control mechanisms to help them regulate their performance.

Vesal & Tavakoli (2015) examine how task type affected the characteristics of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) in Iranian EFL applicants' oral production in the IELTS Speaking test. According to the results, task type had a significant impact ($p < 0.05$) on the complexity, correctness, and fluency of IELTS applicants' oral production during the speaking test. This research has theoretical and practical consequences in the disciplines of testing, education, and learning.

Neira (2019) utilized a mixed-method approach to investigate how knowledge gap activities affected young EFL learners' oral fluency. The information gap activities used the communicative method and task-based learning. The results show an increase in oral fluency as well as a positive attitude toward the intervention technique.

The influence of classroom-based fluency training on intermediate-level German learners' ability to produce more fluent utterances on a Picture Story description test and a monologue task is investigated by Kopnická and Calgary (2016). The results suggest that training had no impact on learners' fluency and that monologue performance outperformed Picture Story performance. Fluency assessments given by native German speakers were linked to speech rate, filled non-lexical pauses, filled lexical pauses, and repeats. The findings have significance for L2 classroom fluency instruction.

Karpovich, Sheredekina, Krepkaia, and Voronova (2021) looked at how academic achievement in this type of language activity might be improved. By working with monologue speaking activities, this study adds to the problem of first-year students' academic performance in the context of studying a foreign language. To gather and analyze data for the study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies was used. A qualitative content analysis of monologue speaking tasks was included in the study. The study's findings suggest that using monologue speaking activities combined with peer engagement and peer assessment can help first-year students enhance their English skills.

Tavakoli (2016) compares monologic versus dialogic task performance to investigate current models of assessing second language fluency and provides a new view into measuring the interactive features of dialogic performance. The findings reveal that dialogue is more fluent in terms of speed, length of the pause, and repair measures. They also show that the number and position of pauses are not different between the two modes. According to the examination of the dialogues, the interactive components of fluency impact the results of fluency assessments.

Like the previous researchers, Os, Jong, and Bosker (2020) looked at characteristics of turn-taking behavior as part of the fluency construct. They studied whether these aspects influenced perceived fluency evaluations of native and nonnative speech differently. As a result, the findings suggest that acoustic aspects of the dialogue are considered part of fluency.

Research Questions

Studies suggest various tasks focused on fluency improvement, but only a few of them have been tested. Moreover, regarding the problems L2 speakers face in developing their speaking fluency, this article looked into the effects of motivation and task types in increasing English speaking fluency for L2 speakers. Thus, this article is designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the role of the motivation and task types on developing speaking fluency for L2 speakers?
2. How are the motivation and task type factors correlated with developing speaking fluency for L2 speakers?

Methods

Participants

The participants in the study were 30 major English students and 13 English language instructors from Da Nang Foreign Language University. The participation of EFL teachers and students was considered essential to reflect independent, possibly differing, perspectives on the same impact of speaking fluency. These participants were chosen as participants because they are the most directly involved in daily EFL teaching and learning, and hence the

most closely linked to the topics addressed in this study. EFL teachers were invited to participate in the study, and their students were asked to fill out a survey. Among EFL teachers, ten were female, and three males, aged 27 to 55, between 5 and 25 years of teaching experience, were awarded the habilitation required for EFL teachers at the tertiary level in Vietnam.

Design of the Study

The study design is a mixed-methods technique, using two sources of data: surveys and a semi-structured interview. In other words, this methodology involves collecting, analyzing and integrating quantitative and qualitative research.

Data collection & analysis

Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data for this study. Firstly, the closed questionnaires were delivered to thirteen instructors and thirty students to answer research questions: "What are the role of the motivation and task types on developing speaking fluency for L2 speakers?"

To get answers for the second research question, "How are the motivation and task type factors correlated on developing speaking fluency for L2 speakers?" we sent the semi-structured interview to five English language teachers.

This study attempted to examine the impacts of motivation and task types on the development of l2 oral fluency in higher education in Vietnam. The data collected from students through questionnaires were quantitatively examined using frequency counts and percentages. On the other hand, three processes are involved in analyzing the qualitative data gathered during the interview. First, listen to the interview via online recording and write down the thoughts expressed for each question; second, read all statements and categorize each interviewee's responses; third, examine all replies offered for each topic. To summarize, the researcher has carefully studied the data acquired through questionnaires (Appendix 1, 2, 3 and 4) and interviews with respondents to deduce significance in light of the study questions.

Results and discussion

Teachers' attitudes on viewing the students' motivational factors

Table1. Student's motivational factors from teachers' perspectives

Motivational factors	Scales	Teacher's response - Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Strong disagree	2	3.07%
	Disagree	4	6.15%
	Neutral	15	23.07%
	Agree	31	47.69%
	Strong agree	13	20%
Total		65	

Table 1 demonstrates the results of the student motivational factors from the teachers' perspective. Teachers were questioned about their thoughts on what motivates students to speak a second language and how that affects oral speaking. As shown in Table 1 above, for theme 2. 20 percent said they strongly agree, 47.69 percent said they agree, 23.07 percent said they have no opinion, 6.15 percent disagreed, and 3.07 percent severely disagreed. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that the majority of teachers (47.69 percent) consented to this aspect, which is supported by the literature review. By the same token, this conclusion is consistent with the fact that motivation in the L2 has been found to be important for fluency development (Heyun, 1999; Loukriz, 2013; Dore, 2015; Nzanana, 2016; N. Segalowitz, 2016a. Selvia Lestari (2018) discovered that a student's motivation to study a foreign language has an impact on their speaking fluency. "Has shown that motivational techniques are the correct technique for enhancing learners' motivation for language use and oral classroom participation, which in turn affects learners' oral proficiency," according to (Loukriz, 2013).

In the same way, the evidence suggests that target language learners may be motivated to acquire English to become fluent in speaking. It is likely that the learner must concentrate on cognitive mechanisms and practice widely to finish the oral procedure without delay. Furthermore, students also believe that their teacher's use of motivational strategies to talk is necessary. It also attempts to offer some insight into the significance of the process as seen through the teacher's eyes. Loukriz (2013) noted that developing speaking skills and oral fluency includes several aspects that cover that the students and the teacher are the most critical factors. Modern teaching methods of foreign languages involve the use of different motivational strategies and activities that support such a development.

This result indicates that motivation is one of the most significant elements affecting students' oral fluency. It is far too easy to conclude that someone's ability to complete tasks is attributable solely to their motivation. It is easy to say that if a student is

motivated enough, they will learn a second language. As a result, one characteristic that influences learners' English speaking ability and fluency is motivation. Table 2 shows that teachers' attitudes on viewing the students' task types factors.

Table 2. Task types factors from teachers' perspectives

Task type factors	Scales	Teacher's response - Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Strong disagree	2	3.07%
	Disagree	14	21.53%
	Neutral	34	52.30%
	Agree	12	18.46%
	Strong agree	3	4.61%
Total		65	

Table 2 represents the findings of the teachers' viewpoints on attitudes towards task types of students. Teachers were asked whether task types such as monologue, dialogue, and narrative decrease oral fluency. Only 4.61 percent highly agreed, 18.46 percent agreed, 52.30 percent had no opinion, 52.30 percent disagreed, and 21.53 percent strongly disagreed. With 18.46 percent of people agreeing, it seems that the type of speaking activity likely has little impact on fluency.

Regarding this result, none of the 13 teachers who took part in the study significantly disagreed that the dialogue task is the most challenging. This notion is consistent with Skehan (2009c), who claims that a dialogic task influences performance. While one person has the floor in a conversation, another has more time to think about and analyze what he will produce shortly. To put it another way, he has time to recover, plan, and prepare the suitable ground for the following message, which helps to perform the task much more accessible.

In contrast, only 4.61 percent of the teachers polled agreed that task types contribute to fluent language. This opinion is also following Tavakoli and Foster (2008) and Yahay and Kheirzadeh (2015), who "explained that a monologue task places greater demands on attentional resources than an interactive task, and thus, this demand can reduce fluency." Their findings suggested that the success of oral presentations on improving learners' speaking accuracy and fluency could be attributed to the learners' possibility to repeat the job. "Dialogue is better than monologue," said Professor Hu Zhianglin at the Fourth International Conference on ELT in China in 2004. In brief, if the teacher creates a type of task that is acceptable and appropriate for the learners' language learning levels, the knowledge can be recalled quickly and fluently. Table 3 presents the students' attitudes towards motivational factors.

Table 3. Student's motivational factors from students' perspectives

Motivational factors	Scales	Students' response - Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Strong disagree	11	7.33%
	Disagree	15	10%
	Neutral	37	24.66%
	Agree	45	30%
	Strong agree	42	28%
Total		150	

Table 3 demonstrates the results of the student motivational factors from the students' perspective. Students were questioned about their thoughts on what motivates students to speak a second language and how that affects oral speaking, as shown in Table 3 above, for motivational factors. Twenty-eight percent said they strongly agree, 30 percent said they agree, 24.66 percent said they have no opinion, 10 percent disagreed, and 7.33 percent severely disagreed. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that the majority of students (30 percent) consented to this aspect, which is supported by the literature review. However, there was a difference between the teachers' and students' opinions on the motivational factors. The figure for students is lower than that of the teachers, at 30% and 47.69% respectively. This conclusion is consistent with the fact that motivation in the L2 has been found to be the third factor for fluency development (Abda, 2017). According to the findings, the main element affecting teaching speaking skills is a lack of exposure, pedagogical factors, and personality factors. Lack of motivation, risk-taking, and self-confidence are all personalities that significantly impact developing speaking skills.

As a result, it can be determined that most students, roughly 30% percent, learn English to speak fluently. For this reason, the literature suggests that target language learners may have a motivation that implies they learn English to achieve speaking fluency. To summarize, the student must focus on cognitive mechanisms and practice extensively to complete the oral process without delay. As noted by N. Ellis (1996). "Although the intention to learn is not always crucial to learning, attention to the material to be learned is." Students with robust and self-willed motivation can focus on target language learning for extended periods and greater accuracy. Just on the opposite, the learner lacks self-willed motivation, and any outside subject can quickly distract his attention. More restructures and qualified procedures are obtained by practicing locking on a specific target language. They improve oral fluency by accelerating up the processing in both formulator and vocal mechanisms. Table 4 presents the students' attitudes towards task types factors.

Table 4: Task type factors from students' perspectives

Task types	Scales	Teacher's response - Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Strong disagree	3	2%
	Disagree	26	17.33%
	Neutral	77	51.33%
	Agree	32	21.33%
	Strong agree	12	8%
Total		150	

Table 4 represents the findings of the students' viewpoints on attitudes towards task types of students. Students were asked whether task types such as monologue, dialogue, and narrative decrease oral fluency. Only 8 percent highly agreed, 21.33 percent agreed, 51.33 percent had no opinion, 17.33 percent disagreed, and 2 percent strongly disagreed. With 51.33 percent of learners having no opinion, it seems that the type of speaking activity likely has little impact on oral fluency.

Only 2% of the students who took part in the study strongly disputed that the dialogue task is the most difficult. This idea is supported by Skehan (2009c), who contends that a dialogic task has an impact on performance. While one person in a conversation gets to the floor, another has more time to consider and study what he will deliver soon. This is also supported by the teachers' comments, with 0 percent of them disagreeing that task kinds are the most challenging challenge when it comes to speaking smoothly.

On the other hand, just 21.33 percent of the students polled agreed that task types help with language fluency. Tavakoli and Foster (2008), Yahay and Kheirzadeh (2015) indicated that a monologue task exerts greater demands on attentional resources than an interactive task, and consequently, this demand can diminish fluency." According to their findings, the efficacy of oral presentations in boosting learners' speaking correctness and fluency could be related to the learners' ability to repeat the task. Professor Hu Zhianglin, speaking at the Fourth International Conference on ELT in China in 2004, observed, "Dialogue is better than a monologue." In brief, if the teacher creates a type of task that is acceptable and appropriate for the learners' language learning levels, the knowledge can be recalled quickly and fluently.

Teachers' responses concerning the relationship between motivation and task type factors

Regarding the link between motivation and task type factors that affect students' oral fluency in the second language, one of the teachers stated the following:

Motivating students to speak in the classroom is a difficult task faced by a number of language teachers around the world. One of the problems that I think affects the students' desire to talk is task type. I can say that when students come

to the university, they do not have basic language knowledge that enables them to communicate in the language. In their high school, they just focus on the grammar to pass the test in the class and the entrance of the examination. They are not fully concentrated on learning each task type for speaking. For example, they know about a monologue and a dialogue but don't learn the strategies to practice these types of speaking. This leads to demotivating their desire to talk in front of the class.

Another teacher commented on the subject, saying, For me, the elements that determine students' willingness to communicate in the language are:

Poor background knowledge, inexperience, and exposure, for example, students do not have the opportunity to speak English outside of class because they are afraid of making mistakes; most students do not believe in themselves; if they had motivation, they would have spoken and used the language more effectively. Another component is English language teachers' continued support for learners; we all, English language teachers, assist students by offering appropriate strategies for teaching speaking as well as relevant tasks for their levels. So, I believe that this is one of the best ways to encourage students to speak up.

In general, one may conclude from the preceding discussion that the mentioned factors have the most significant influence on students' motivation to communicate in a second language: The first is a lack of appropriate teaching tactics regarding speaking task structure. Due to a lack of basic language knowledge, such as poor grammar and vocabulary, the students lack self-confidence. A lack of practice speaking skills may be the cause of a poor background experience. This factor could also be due to a fear of making mistakes since other students would laugh at them if they do, and this fear of being laughed at leads to a lack of self-confidence. Consequently, these factors contribute to a lack of desire, which has an impact on the development of speaking skills and oral fluency.

Discussion

This section provides a discussion based on the research findings. The discussions present the answer to two research questions related to the role of motivation and task and the relationship of motivation and task type factors on developing speaking fluency for L2 speakers.

The first research question sought to examine the motivation and task types on developing speaking fluency for L2 speakers from the perspective of the teachers and students. According to the quantitative analysis, with 47.69 percent and 30 percent agreement of teachers and students on the motivational factors, it seems that this factor

significantly affects speaking fluency. In contrast, the task type factor was lower at 18.46% for teachers and 21.33% for students. This suggests that task type is not important as the motivation factor.

More specifically, participants also stated that their thoughts of motivating factors were linked to teaching strategies to encourage students to speak up. When it comes to increasing speaking skills, particularly oral fluency, motivation perceptions are crucial. Students are enthusiastic about learning English. According to Harmer (2002), motivation is that some form of internal drive that pushes someone to do things to achieve something. The data also show that encouraging students requires various strategies, both within and outside the classroom. This also agrees with the theory of the conversation from the perspective of Vygotsky (1978, p.189). The theory proposes that learning is, by definition, a social phenomenon in which the acquisition of new knowledge is the result of the interaction of people participating in a dialogue, and learning is a dialectical process in which one individual's point of view contrasts with the other in order to reach an agreement. It may be concluded that a student aspires to speak English because lecturers who instruct her in speaking provide support and encouragement. Also, effective teaching methodologies should be teaching speaking, which paves the way to oral fluency.

Regarding the task type factor, the results also indicated that this factor is the second factor in facilitating oral fluency, even though not many students and teachers agree on this aspect. However, according to Ellis (2009), the tasks (interactive vs. monologic; monologue vs. dialogue) affect the L2 performance. More specifically, from the previous research, the numerous associations between motivation and task types suggest that the monologue dialogue task harms fluency, whereas performance is statistically more fluent in dialogue but also indicates that performances in the two modes are not different. Besides, Ellis (2009) also proposed that the task is considered the most difficult because the information is unfamiliar and not clearly structured for the learners. As a result, while a task design element that necessitates the structure and type of activities may contribute to motivation assessments, it should not be overlooked while teaching speaking. More importantly, if there is an apparent effect on the structure of their tasks, learners will produce more fluent language on the structured tasks (Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005; Candilas, 2021). As a result, it is recommended that L2 instruction concentrates on putting students in the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1962). A reasonable conclusion is that task types can help learners speak more fluently, which is evident in fluency's temporal and repair dimensions.

The second research question was to examine if the motivation to speak was linked to speaking tasks. Affective responses had a relatively important role in affecting performance fluency in a task where learners are exposed to comfortable and familiar information and structures through a series of dialogues or monologues and the

narrative. This assignment was rated as the least stressful, and participants thought they completed it nicely. However, results differed significantly from tasks, suggesting that teachers should present a diversity of activities since they are likely to influence L2 fluency and, as a result, speech perception in diverse ways. This confirms by Dörnyei (2002), who indicated that task motivation might not merely be a composite of relatively stable trait and state task-related motivation, but also a dynamic process.

Conclusion

Based on the quantitative findings and illustrated qualitative comments, it proposed that teachers consider that a student would be successful with proper motivation and that task success is due to just being motivated. In some ways, students believe that teachers who do not have enough interest to motivate the students in English classes might provoke low perceptions of motivation among some learners. Language practitioners could also consider task engagement an essential measure to better understand task features that promote speaking fluency. In other words, task motivation is the motivation for performing particular learning tasks and has been related to success in second language learning.

In addition, learners in this research believed that motivation is important when talking about improving speaking skills, specifically in oral fluency. That can support the motivational theory that a learner's intrinsic desire can motivate him to overcome various factors that aid in language development, which has a positive effect on oral fluency as well. Real-life language use, on the other hand, rarely caters to what learners can master today. To make progress in learners' language development, they must be challenged, scaffolded, and praised for their efforts to continue taking risks.

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Biodata

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire for teachers

No	Motivational factors
2	You believe learners are motivated to speak English fluently.
4	Learners believe their teacher implement motivational strategies to make them talk.
6	You believe motivation is important when talking about enhancing the speaking skill, specifically in the oral fluency.
8	Learners believe motivation in the English language classes is good for them.
10	Learners believe teachers do not have enough interest to motivate the students in English classes.

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for teachers

No	Task type factors
12	You believe the most difficult task is a monologue.
14	You believe the most difficult task is a dialogue.
18	You believe the most difficult task is a narrative.
22	You believe the most difficult task is not a monologue.
26	You believe the most difficult task is not a dialogue.

Appendix 3: Questionnaire for students

No	Motivational factors
2	You believe you are motivated to speak English fluently.
4	You believe your teacher implement motivational strategies to make you talk
6	You believe that motivation is important when talking about improving the speaking skill, specifically in the oral fluency.
8	You believe motivation in the English language classes is good for the students.
10	You believe teachers do not have enough interest to motivate the students in English classes.

Appendix 4: Questionnaire for students

No	Task type factors
12	You believe the most difficult task is a monologue.
14	You believe the most difficult task is a dialogue.
18	You believe the most difficult task is a narrative.
22	You believe the most difficult task is not a monologue.
26	You believe the most difficult task is not a dialogue.

Implementing Digital Techniques to Stimulate EFL Students' Engagement: A Case Study in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: Digital techniques, motivation, student engagement, technology

This is a mixed-method case study on the use of digital tools to encourage student collaboration in an EFL program class at the University of Economics – Technology for Industries (UNETI). The data were gathered via semi-structured interviews with the teacher, observations, and questionnaires. On the basis of textual and statistical data, the results indicated that both teacher and students were using a variety of digital technologies. Participants are reported to have used digital tools to deliver content, organize class activities, upload and download materials, communicate and interact with peers. The study reveals that students felt motivated through the specific use of technology in the classroom, raising participants' confidence in interacting with collective learning networks and accessing online activities through digital technologies. The research further demonstrates that teaching methods which promote cooperation have consequences for institutional practices in professional development as well as learning assistance schemes and teaching practices.

Introduction

A great bulk of educational researchers have studied one of the most important factors during the past decade: student engagement. Coates (2005) states that the primary topic focused on deciphering the underlying significance of students' actions regarding the teaching and learning process. Additionally, digital technology has permeated every area of life, including schooling. Educators and politicians have also pushed for the incorporation of digital technology into education. Students now study in a different way than they did in the past. They are surrounded by technology and have instant access to a wealth of information. According to Cooner (2010), 92% of students had access to technology at home, but less than half used it for education. Pedagogy must evolve together with the times; however, students may lose motivation and interest if teachers continue to teach topics and skills that they believe are irrelevant and

unusable in the real world (Cubeles & Riu, 2016; Ernst & Moye, 2013; Chuang et al., 2015). Through the use of technology in education, teachers will be able to inspire and engage all children, from learning impaired to brilliant and talented. Moreover, both students and teachers profit from the use of technology in the classroom (Flanagan et al., 2013; Coates, 2010, Chow & Armatas, 2018). Liu (2016) claims that combining real-world applications of technology with other academic subjects helps motivate students. By connecting inquiry-based learning to real-world issues, students' intrinsic value of learning increases, thus boosting interest and motivation (Usher, 2012). Additionally, students may gain competence by applying abstract concepts to real-world situations. Teachers may alter their instruction, engage students, and accommodate students of various skill levels by incorporating technology into the classroom.

Although digital technologies are used in education, different studies indicate that their usage is restricted and dispersed (Corner, 2010; Flanagan et al., 2013; Coates, 2010, Chuang et al. 2015; Ho, 2019; Nguyen, 2020; Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Henderson et al., 2015). In reality, some studies advocated that technology is utilized for administrative duties rather than instructional assistance (Ho, 2019; Nguyen, 2020; Pham, 2020). The difficulties of using digital technologies in education, the significance of adopting and using them in schools cannot be overstated, which should be recognized and handled. Furthermore, due to the COVID-19 epidemic, few researchers believe political choices drove digital technology into classrooms (Teo, 2010; Thomas et al. 2013; Ho, 2019; Nguyen; 2020; Pham, 2020; Van et al., 2021; Hoang & Le, 2021). However, school personnel must alter pedagogical methods and modify learning settings. Wyatt et al. (2010) advocate that instructors were mandated to incorporate digital technology into classroom instruction after school leaders and the authorities decided to do so.

Vietnamese educational system has been incorporated with a similar paradigm in accordance with technology-based instruction. The Ministry of Education and Training's Directive No. 9772/2008/CT-BGDDT (2008) mandated that institutions enhance their use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in teaching and training. According to the ICT Development Index, Vietnam's access to ICT has substantially increased since 2000. This is consistent with the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization's (SEMEO) 2010 study, which said that policy guidelines, technology infrastructure, and resources should assist schools in Vietnam in transforming teaching and learning methods via the use of technology. These critical elements have the potential to make it possible for technology to be integrated into education in Vietnam (Hoang & Le, 2021). Especially in the COVID-19 epidemic, according to Nguyen (2021), institutions and students rely heavily on digital technologies to educate themselves. The mobility restriction order makes it difficult for educational institutions to maintain face-to-face sessions with students. In order to maintain instructional programs, pedagogical academics count on the development of the Internet and digital networks (Chau, 2021; Nguyen, 2021). During the pandemic, nations with strong internet infrastructure and gadgets can react better. The epidemic not only affects economies and supply chains. However, the COVID-19 epidemic has put the idea of digital remote learning on hold. According to several studies that are shown to be insufficient for digital learning, online and distant learning are possible with existing

infrastructure. Following the epidemic, academics have been debating the topic of digital transformation education. Many worldwide forums anticipate that education's future relies on the digital revolution as other areas of everyday life. In addition, numerous variables have been identified as influencing how teachers incorporate technology into their classrooms, including teachers' intensity of usage, related skills, confidence in utilizing digital techniques, learning perspectives, and access to technologies.

However, it is unknown how lecturers in Vietnam utilize technology in academic practice. University instructors are required to acquire the skills and information necessary to instruct students using digital technology (Nguyen, 2020). While this, educators do not integrate technology into their classes despite being conscious of the potential advantages. This raises the question of how well pedagogical institutions use digital technologies to improve the teaching and learning environment. Another significant problem was along with attitudes among teachers and students when they engaged in classroom activities with technology. To address this issue, the researcher examined how teachers and students at the University of Economics – Technology for Industries (UNETI) use digital technology to advance their teaching and learning methods and their perceptions towards the implementation of digital techniques.

Literature review

Student engagement

Student engagement is defined as a meaningful collaboration throughout the learning environment that should emphasize the correlation between students and teachers, classmates, institutions, instruction, syllabus, and curriculum (Bui et al., 2021). In addition, it could possibly be explained that students' engagement could be a powerful basis for the academic lecturers to design an appropriate and effective educational technique to maximize students' learning experience.

Student involvement may be characterized as behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement, according to Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris (2004).

Tour (2015) demonstrated *behavioral engagement* as students' visible desirable exhibition. In other words, it entails observing students' active participation in connection with school and class regulation and procedures. It could additionally indicate how persistently and attentively students perform on the assigned tasks.

Cognitive engagement, defined by Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris (2004), is evidence of how much students devote time, effort, and energy into learning processes. To be honest, the analysis evaluated learners' critical thinking to expand on the information being presented in class. Students must be engaged in their cognitive processes and motivated to exercise self-control throughout the learning process.

Emotional involvement is one of the key components of student engagement. Cognition-

emotional activation aligns with emotional responses to learning-related problems, such as an institution, class, instructors, or classmates (Tour, 2015). Students' reactions to the task's completion should be categorized under the general theme of negativity. It involves positive appraisal associated with eagerness, interest, motivation, excitement, or curiosity. However, the negative distribution consists of anger, disappointment, worry, stress, or fear.

Student participation has generally been regarded to be the fundamental topic, which nearly all teachers should realize. When assessing and analyzing student involvement, they may create a more effective syllabus using instructional resources, course content, and methods to transmit the desired information.

Digital techniques

The concept of digital techniques in education

The digital era has elevated technology to a key role in conceptualizing language change. The teaching and learning of the English language have shifted dramatically as a result of the unprecedented entrance of digital technology. Without a doubt, Trowler (2010) says that technology advancements have succeeded in displacing conventional teaching methods and thus assisting learners in broadening their perspective on the learning process inside classrooms and outside of them.

The implementation of digital techniques in EFL worldwide classes

Teachers' use of digital techniques

Educators are increasingly using digital technologies for a variety of instructional objectives. These objectives need the selection of suitable digital technologies to facilitate the teaching and learning processes. Teachers use technology for a variety of purposes: to improve student's academic achievement (Al-Hariri & Al-Hattami, 2017; Bond et al. 2018), to increase students' motivation to learn (Ho, 2018), to increase student engagement (Coates, 2015; Nguyen, 2020; Pham, 2020), to provide opportunities for student collaboration (Nguyen, 2020; Pham, 2020), to facilitate communication between students and the lecturer and interaction among students (Fredricks et al., 2004). These various goals need the development of targeted instructional methods for incorporating technology in order to impact students' learning (Pham, 2020) favorably. As a result of this requirement, a growing number of studies have been conducted on teachers' usage of digital technologies.

Some digital devices have been progressively utilized in order to enhance teaching and learning processes. Studies by Liu (2016), Chow & Armatas (2018), and Yin (2018) indicate two major pedagogical goals for classroom technology are learning management systems and presentation software, in addition to web 2.0, e-portfolios, and e-assessment. Chuang, Weng & Huang (2015) distinguish three different types of tools, namely graphical and visualization tools, communication technology tools, and social media tools. Cubeles and Riu (2016), who hold the same views, value first-hand learning experiences comparable to those reported in the previous author's research, then social media and mobile devices, and finally learning management

system tools. Students' academic performance, students' motivation and interest, as well as students' peer interaction should all be attributed to many different reasons.

Teachers may use digital technology in a variety of ways in their classrooms. Kirkwood & Price (2014) reviewed 47 publications on using technology to improve teaching and learning in higher education and found three categories. These include “replicating current teaching practices, augmenting existing teaching, and/or changing teaching and learning processes and outcomes” (p. 11). Each category represents a unique instructional application of digital technology. While the first two seem to seek to improve instructors' current methods, the third implies substantial pedagogical shifts.

In the first category, instructors utilize technology to provide content to students or “different technologies for providing the same information or resources to learners” (Kirkwood & Price, 2014, p. 13). In other words, technology supports current teaching. Teachers do not alter their teaching methods but use technology to convey them, which was used in several studies, for example, instructors utilized “synchronous” (e-lectures) and “separate” (PPT and audio files) presentations to lecture (Griffin et al., 2009). Green et al. (2018) also looked at the usage of YouTube videos for case teaching in health management and policy. They found YouTube videos to be a “useful source of information to complement current case teaching” (p. 48). The use of model videos in developing students' oral presentation skills and Blackboard Learn in face-to-face courses are examples of how teachers replicate their existing practices using new technologies.

In the second category of complementing existing instruction, lecturers offer students with other versions of course materials, resources, or tools. Technologies are supplemental instructional aids. Teachers use digital technologies to access and improve students' learning. Several study findings fit under the second group. For example, instructors produced podcast episodes to accompany each course so students may revisit their lectures (Green et al., 2018). According to Chow et al. (2018), 95% of university instructors utilized “Content” features more than other tools in their LMS.

This indicates that instructors used the LMS to provide curriculum and “store learning resources for students to download or access” (p. 133). This finding matches findings from research on the use of LMS in higher education as well as instructors' use of technology tools to enhance student learning outcomes (Liu, 2016).

Lecturers frequently utilize digital technology to perform and improve current activities (Kirkwood & Price, 2014). At this level, instructors simply alter the technology they employ in their classrooms, not the method they educate. Tour (2015) discovered that instructors used digital technology to reinforce current pedagogies, despite the affordances of connectivity, experimentation, sharing, collective intelligence, empowerment, and multimodality. Tour ascribed this to teachers' beliefs or attitudes about the function of digital technology in teaching and learning, which seemed to have a substantial effect on their students' experience (Kirkwood & Price, 2012).

Thirdly, instructors utilize digital technology to create “structural improvements in teaching and learning processes” (Kirkwood & Price, 2014, p. 13). Teachers modify instructional activities or modules to improve student learning results. Developing blended learning possibilities with online lectures to engage students in active involvement (Cooner, 2010). Teachers prefer to utilize technology to replicate and reinforce current practices. Thus this kind of transformational technological intervention is uncommon in an empirical study. Also, changing educational methods may be difficult for instructors.

Students are provided with several versions of course materials to support current learning resources. In these circumstances, these technologies are very critical to student learning. The aforementioned studies, which were conducted using LMS platforms, Facebook, and other mobile-assisted apps, all show that the previously stated assumption is true. To provide further assistance with teaching practice, a wider range of mobile-based technologies apps, such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, were implemented in Liu (2016), Manca and Ranieri (2016), Chow & Armatas (2018), and Yin (2018). In Chow & Armatas (2018), 1457 lecturers were examined as part of a study on teaching practices and an LMS as a learning platform. In particular, the findings showed that 99% of participants used LMS to store instructional materials for students to download. Technical instruments were used to engage students in learning activities. They did not alter the teaching approach, rather concentrated on supporting current practices. According to the results in Tour (2015), instructors thought that digital tools were useful and major instruments in correcting students' mistakes and doing anything else, such as experimenting and sharing.

Digital technology, moreover, was employed while lecturers additionally altered and innovated the teaching and learning process. It is advocated that classroom activities were redesigned to suit the learning environment and boost students' outcomes. Coates (2005) highlights a selectedly new teaching method called blended learning prospects integrated with e-learning lectures to collaborate students in energetic-mannered participation. However, this type of transformation occurs rarely, particularly in Taiwanese teaching contexts, since it requires the teacher much effort and preparation to reproduce and reinforce existing practices (Liu, 2016).

Students' use of digital technologies

Several studies have shown that students utilize digital technology in several ways, including Bond et al. (2018), Delfino (2019), Henderson et al. (2015), and Sweeny (2017). The population of more than 1500 students was assessed in Henderson et al. (2015). These results revealed a combination of digital tools and applications, such as obtaining online learning materials via LMS, utilizing Google, accessing video-sharing websites like Youtube, and interacting with friends on Facebook. Bond et al. (2018) also investigated German instructional contexts with roughly the same participants as the previous study. 80% of the students utilized technology-based applications like LMS, Facebook, and email to communicate with one another, while doing given assignments and homework. In a nutshell, the researchers discovered that students mostly employed technology to manage schedules and deadlines while staying up to speed on school-related news. Without question, technology is a fundamental component of student

learning and staying informed.

Various studies show how students perceive and utilize technology. Henderson et al. (2015) surveyed 1658 Australian university students. They discovered that pupils used digital tools for various activities while learning. For example, students used the LMS and online library to access "official" digital resources like e-books or e-textbooks, while others used search engines like Google, YouTube, and Facebook to collaborate with classmates and instructors. These results support Delfino's (2019) findings that students used virtual learning environments to access course materials such as e-books, lecture notes, and announcements. Mobile phones or social media were most often used to communicate with friends, discuss tasks, and prepare for exams. Not only do students utilize digital technology to share materials, but they also engage with others through learning networks (Sweeney, 2017). Studying is done by approximately 80% of German students, according to Bond et al. (2018). According to prior studies, students use technology primarily for learning logistics. Henderson et al. (2017) showed that most students (n=1,658) used technology to manage calendars, timetables, deadlines, and course requirements and stay up with university news and course material. Students' highest digital competency was accessing and posting information and resources, responding to others, and gaining knowledge via queries. The technology available to pupils was also limited. Lai and Hong (2015) studied 880 New Zealand students' use of digital technologies. "Only used digital technology for academic, social, and personal activities," they found. This finding echoes prior research (Tour, 2015; Pham, 2020) and possibly explains that students are unaware of how digital technologies may help them study (Pham, 2020). This aligns with teachers' objectives for utilizing technology in the classroom. Students tend to oppose change when teachers seldom use new tools.

Stimulating students with digital techniques

According to Chau (2021) and Nguyen (2021), science and technology have improved and modernized humanity's prosperity. Technology innovation is a great way to improve the quality and efficacy of second language teaching and make students more employable in further education. In this instance, technology plays an important role in exposing students to current learning materials and genuine inputs. Several research studies have examined the beneficial effect of integrating digital techniques in education to improve students' language competence. The technology acceptance model originates in a survey question delivered to 159 students (Teo, 2010). The author revealed that the technology acceptance model was a significant and strong model for helping technology adoption, in line with communicating participants' viewpoints on utilizing digital methods. Similar results have been reported by Thomas et al. (2013) comparing Singaporean and Malaysian instructors. Despite their divergent belief, two distinct target groups recognized the significance of digital techniques. Also, motivation was important in Trowler (2010) and Liu (2016). An empirical study by Liu (2016) indicated that 14.8% of the teachers reported they took advantage of digital techniques because they could help students. 17% of the respondents consented that technology-assisted them in supervising students' behavior and routines. 31.1% of the respondents stated that technology-based

techniques encouraged students to be more engaged and motivated with more interesting and entertaining connections between teachers and students, or students and their peers. The positive effect was contributed via findings of Trowler (2010) at mobile phones, computers, and ipads that they may improve students' attentiveness and participation in class activities, accounting for 59% of participants.

Influences of digital techniques on teaching and learning process

With the goal of stimulating students who have difficulty in their learning process, many researchers explored the effectiveness of digital techniques, for example, Wyatt et al. (2010), Ernst and Moye (2013), Flanagan and Richardson (2013), and Delfino (2019). Students struggling with conventional classrooms are the primary focus of Wyatt et al. (2010). Academic learning is a problem that people will have to work to master. So, the writers adopted various approaches, one of which was to utilize "real world" applications, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Youtube. Social isolation was a problem for primary school students, according to Ernst and Moye (2013). Low socioeconomic status students are a sign of this case study. The researchers proposed a technology education classroom method to regulate the courses. A safe and neutral place was created for children to develop their communication and social skills. When technology is used in courses, it is possible for people to satisfy their emotional needs and increase their social connections. The study performed by Flanagan, Bouck, and Richardson (2013) focused on a middle school special education teacher who taught reading to students in a special needs classroom. The participants of the study had a significant rate of impairments. It was too costly and needed specialized training for technology to be effective. Most of the current work in this field relates to assistive technology and education.

Relevant studies in Vietnamese teaching context

According to Hoang & Le (2021), the mandatory shift of COVID-19 to online education and learning has evolved into a necessary component of all students' lifetime learning. Regardless of their ICT abilities, teachers will be forced to adapt their delivery methods while using ICT. Instructors are required to comply with this criterion. To overcome the challenges of teaching, teachers must depend on this area of professional knowledge and skills. Hence, there have been several studies on the implementation of digital techniques in teaching and learning English in the Vietnamese context (Ho, 2019; Pham, 2020; Nguyen, 2020; Hoang & Le, 2021; Van et al., 2021).

The research led by Ho (2019) seeks to determine whether Quizlet is more successful than traditional techniques like paper flashcards in assisting English learners. The trial comprised pre-test, training (two one-hour reading and vocabulary learning sessions each week for four weeks), and immediate post-test, as well as delayed post-test. Every single student in a single classroom was studied. They were divided into two groups. Students got twenty new words from a reading book each week. During the first two weeks, group B utilized paper flashcards. Group A then used paper flashcards, while group B followed up with a Quizlet quiz two weeks later. This was offset by having two separate tools. Six participants were given prior training

sessions' videos, screenshots, and pre- and post-test questionnaires. The technologies seem to enhance vocabulary learning. Quizlet appears to be better than flashcards for vocabulary development. Quizlet also satisfies students' language learning requirements. Quizlet's flashcards do not motivate students to improve pronunciation, whereas paper flashcards do. In English as a second language, apps seem to be better able to provide a wider range of linguistic settings and the need for exposure to native English in the Vietnamese educational system.

Pham (2020) examined the participants' opinions on mobile-assisted language learning. The study obtained noteworthy results via the use of survey questionnaires as the main data collection method. Qualitative and quantitative findings indicated that participants perceived mobile-assisted language favorably. The questionnaire was designed to meet the study's goals. 95 individuals participated in the poll. The mixed-method research methodology yielded many significant findings. Overall, participants found mobile devices useful in the classroom. They said mobile-assisted language learning was useful and easy to use. They also got enthusiastic when studying using mobile gadgets in class. Future language learning activities make sense because of this. Mobile-assisted language learning is seen as a new teaching and learning technique. Furthermore, instructors and students should strive to enhance their digital literacy.

A case study conducted by Nguyen (2020) implemented Kahoot, a mobile-assisted application and a descendant of "Personal Response Systems" in the investigation. This study aims to discover how the impact is measured with respect to Kahoot. To determine learners' perception on Kahoot, survey data using a Likert scale was gathered. Kahoot's quiz questions included more open-ended alternatives rather than closed-ended ones. The findings obtained previously suggest that Kahoot, through enhancing class interaction with the teacher, may help students learn better. This fosters customized and interactive learning, resulting in more student engagement. An efficient and less intrusive method to assess student learning is by using Kahoot. Based on these results, Kahoot seems to be a sound teaching strategy.

Hoang & Le (2021) examined English teachers' perceptions towards switching from face-to-face to online courses at various Vietnamese vocational schools. A questionnaire survey and nine in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data from 45 vocational English instructors. The findings were used to assess vocational English teachers' views towards using technology in teaching English via virtual classrooms. This research advocated instructors' positive attitudes towards online teaching, although teachers were reported to be under pressure when being forced to shift to online mode. The authors also emphasized teachers' awareness and flexibility to adapt their teaching conditions during the outbreak of COVID-19.

Sharing the same view as the previous authors, Van et al. (2021) investigated the popularity and efficacy of using technology in English teaching among third-year EFL students at Van Lang University. Data analysis from the questionnaire and interview indicated technology enabled students to frequently make use of educational apps, smartphones, and tablets. The authors concluded that using technology to study English had the potential to encourage students to enhance their language skills and accelerate their learning process.

The study referenced in this section makes several significant points. It is recognized that the use of technology contributes to students' development of greater self-confidence, thus boosting motivation and a desire to study. More sophisticated use of technology in pedagogy enables instructors to be inclusive of students at all levels. Recognizing and using such a framework enables school administrators to collaborate more successfully with faculty and students who utilize technology in the classroom and in the real world. To be most successful, students must be taught in their preferred method of learning. When teachers are placed in a technology-supported environment that is more conducive to their students' learning styles, they can utilize a variety of technologies that have the potential to engage students and support constructivist learning approaches, such as Google Docs, websites, computer software, LMS, PowerPoint, clicker-based response systems, and other types of interactive technology. Educators' objective is to integrate current technology to facilitate effective learning. Digital technology has become a popular trend across the globe, and Vietnam is not an exception. Most of the aforementioned studies have also brought to light the topic of students and instructors on digital methods in higher education. Additional advantages were identified in the literature review: digital gadgets or apps were reported with various effects on instructors and students. Most of the reviewed articles explore vocabulary acquisition or participants' attitudes in general. Very little is devoted to individual language learning use and their habit of using digital techniques. Hence, the goal of this study is to find out if students and teachers at a high-education institution like the University of Economics–Technology for Industries are receptive to utilizing digital tools, how they utilize technology applications in the teaching and learning process as well as their perspectives with specific components namely *behavioral, cognitive and emotional engagement* towards technology's usefulness on their interaction in language classrooms.

Research Questions

This research aims to study how teachers and students implement digital technology in EFL classes and investigate their perceptions towards the use of new teaching techniques; thus, two research questions were addressed as follow:

1. What and how are digital techniques used in EFL classes at UNETI?
2. What are teacher and students' perceptions towards the implementation of digital techniques in EFL classes at UNETI?

Research methodology

Pedagogical setting & participants

University of Economics – Technology for Industries (UNETI) was established in 1956, regulated by the Ministry of Industry and Trade. Students can select a variety of majors regarding Accounting, Business Administration, Finance and Banking, Engineering, Electricity, Electronics, English Linguistics, and so on. English is a mandatory subject at this school, and it must be completed with four credits of English language study and at least 450 TOEIC in order to graduate.

The case analyzed in this research was called Vivian and one of her EFL classes at UNETI. The study was conducted among 30 second-year elementary students. Those students were forced to pass compulsory exams to enter the university. Then, they needed to take the placement test to be placed in the appropriate class. The textbook Market Leader (3rd edition, elementary) is being used in class for English 2. Students are required to accomplish four language skills. Moreover, the grammar and vocabulary included in each lesson help complement the students' practice of language skills. It seems as if lecturers have tried to accommodate diverse learning styles and study methods among their university students to see whether they can better engage them in learning English or not. Students were encouraged to utilize the LMS to access course materials and communicate with the instructor. They were permitted to use computers and cellphones to supplement their studies, especially in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Vivian, the lecturer, has been teaching English at UNETI for 12 years. She is a linguistic master, as well as the head of a private English center that offers supplementary English classes, for example, for high school and university admission exams. This implies that she has excellent subject understanding and confidence in teaching English 2 to pupils.

The researcher, therefore, chose to do a case study on how teachers and students use digital methods in teaching and learning English 2, in accordance with investigating their perception. Due to ethical considerations, participants were put under false and disguised identities so as to ensure anonymity.

Design of the study

Stake (2013) claims that a case study studies a specific instance and uses that understanding to comprehend crucial details. Stake (2013) suggests the use of a case study when a question about current occurrences that an investigator has no influence over is posed. A case study enables academics to examine how the situation around the phenomena influences it. The case study enabled the research to examine participants' classroom experiences and practices, interviews, and focus groups. Many case studies serve to examine phenomena, populations, or general conditions (Stake, 2013). Researchers analyze numerous examples in order to provide various views on the problem. This encourages research to examine both similarities and differences among instances. Every single instance is called a "phenomenon" in a certain environment.

This study highlighted a typical case at UNETI, hoping to provide vital insights and rich information first, then lead to in-depth understanding. The case of English non-majored classes includes 30 students from the Faculty of Accounting, and their lecturer has nearly 12-year of experience teaching English as a foreign language.

Data collection & analysis

Due to the mixed-method case study research, the researcher selected three data collection tools: semi-structural interviews, observation, and questionnaires. Prior to the study, participants were provided with research information, their program role, and withdrawal rights. Furthermore, researchers obtained authorization to record both kinds of interviews and classroom

observations. COVID-19 epidemic has necessitated researchers and participants to meet online for all data collection procedures, as they use Google Meet, phone calls, Google Forms, and other technological tools.

The lecturer was interviewed individually: before and after using digital methods in a class. The researcher was permitted to observe one class lecture after the first semi-structural interview with the teacher. After a four-week project, a questionnaire was delivered to the students in order to investigate their attitudes towards using digital techniques in virtual classes.

A *semi-structured interview* was done in English, and after being transcribed, the document was sent to that teacher to check to minimize misunderstanding and ambiguity. The interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The audio recording allowed the researcher to revise the prompt, improve interviewing methods, and alter the focus of the discussions. The author conducted a second interview with the lecturer after the observation and focused group in order to elicit discussion about their teaching practices using digital methods in relation to the observed films in class. Transcripts of audiotapes were sent to interviewees prior to the data processing to ensure the accuracy of the data gathered (Stake, 2020).

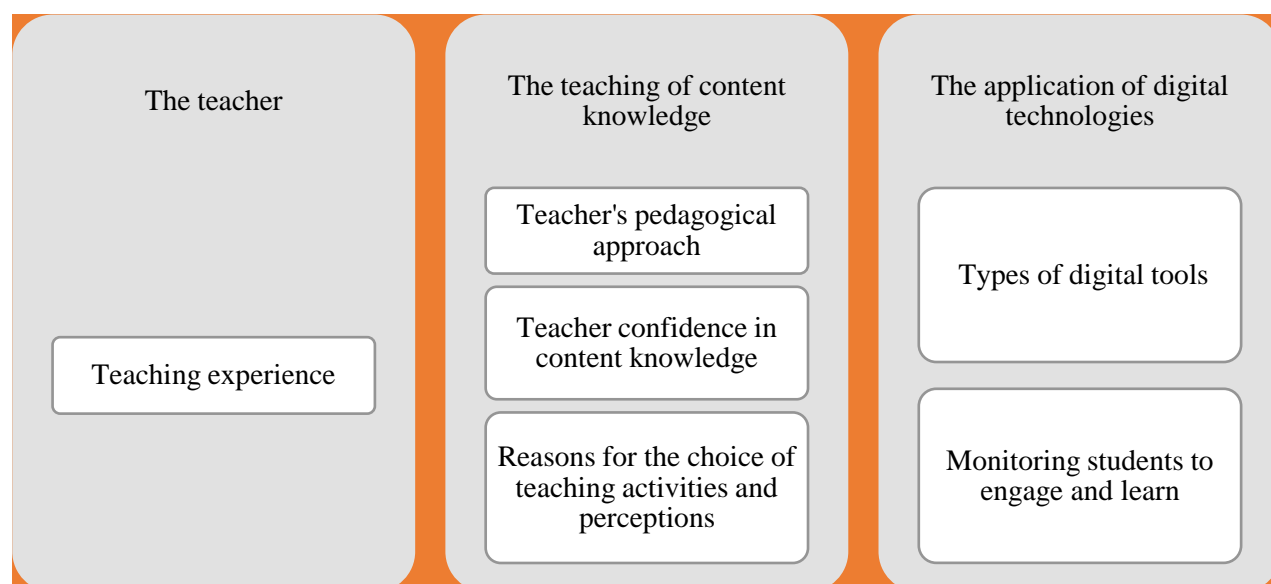
According to Teo, Luan and Sing (2008), *observation "is a source of evidence capturing particular occurrences at a certain period of time in a particular setting."* The class observation was conducted the week after the first interview. The lecture lasted 135 minutes on Google Meet due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The teacher and students' responses to the use of digital techniques were carefully observed to facilitate stimulated memory interviews. Such observation aided in the comprehension of the participant's real usage of technology and any classroom issues. The notes focused on (1) the manner in which lecturer and students interacted, (2) how teacher conveyed topic material to students, provided directions in English and integrated digital tools into their instructions and (3) students' reactions and engagements with classmates and their use of technology.

The questionnaire is considered as one valuable tool to collect valuable and numeric information from the target population. The researcher made a decision to adapt the questionnaire by Flanagan, Bouck & Richardson (2013) as this research had similar aims in examining types of technology, students' frequency, and their perceptions towards using digital techniques in class. The Likert-scale was used to easily quantify and evaluate the answers. Respondents were asked to rate the 29 items by selecting one of five options: *strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree*.

With regards to data analysis, the research employed Creswell's (2008) six-step qualitative data analysis followed. The data was first translated and transcribed into a textual form and then divided into separate files using the students' pseudonyms. Translation and revision were undertaken to avoid confusion. When the researcher got the written information, they went over it a second time in order to get a full understanding. Categorization takes place at the third step, shown in table 1. Once the data sources were grouped into such themes, they were described and linked together to illustrate the results. This investigation was required to establish whether

the results of this research were compatible with or contradictory to those of previous studies.

Table 1: Categories of separate qualitative data collected through interview and observation



Secondly, SPSS software was employed to analyze the quantitative data from the questionnaire. The Cronbach alpha was calculated as well to guarantee the reliability of the questionnaire. The numeric data analysis offered the researcher an insight into three main concepts of student engagement, namely behavioral, cognitive and emotional engagement. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient is used to determine the internal consistency of a multiple-item questionnaire. The usual range is between .00 and 1.0. The Cronbach's alpha score was more than 0.80, indicating that all questions were constructed similarly. In a nutshell, the questionnaire was reliable and trustworthy. Cronbach's alpha is 0.83 in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability statistics of the questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of item
.83	29

Results/Findings and discussion

The teacher

Vivian was one of the educators in the high-quality program. To be frank, she believed teaching this topic would boost her English skills.

This education offers me the atmosphere to utilize English often. After that class, the way I spoke English was never the same. I believe I'm becoming better and better at pronunciation.

Vivian felt secure in speaking English in class. She felt that she understood the course material since she worked on the translation of the primary textbook used in the course.

However, she felt that the use of English sometimes hindered her teaching, as is seen in the following quote:

If I utilize Vietnamese, the narrative will be humorous, which may help students remember the information better. That's a lot of work.

It is thought that adopting English solely would not always be successful. Vivian's teaching was aided by digital technology. She used the software loaded on her laptop to prepare lectures, create presentations, or draw graphs and charts. She knew how to use various internet search engines for her lessons.

She intended to use digital technology in her teaching, but she did not have adequate time for it. Vivian has been trained to use Google Meet and LMS platform to teach online and communicate with students by posting lessons, assignments or even getting students' responses through a poll survey on that application. Her ICT skills with Powerpoint, computer game-based software or data-searching skill on the Internet was considered to be good as she has had much experience in E-teaching courses. Contrary to Hoang & Le (2021), the majority of the lecturer was unsure and not confident of their technological competence. However, Vivian reported that the use of digital advances as teaching assistance was still restricted and ineffective. This finding is consistent with teachers' experiences studied in Bond et al. (2018), Cubeles & Riu (2016), and Shelton (2014). When she taught, she urged students to be engaged and self-directed. She was cognizant of first-year students' problems, as indicated in this quote:

They must start learning English-related topics with zero prior knowledge or resources, or they may know the information but do not know how to express it in English. To study together, they haven't made any pals.

By offering them guidance on online resource uses and the merits of teamwork, she was able to ensure that they would rapidly adapt to the new learning environment. The results align with what has been researched in Sweeny (2017), Tour (2015), Ho (2019), and Nguyen (2020).

In short, Vivian felt secured in teaching in English since she had prior expertise. When she tried to teach using English, she realized that she sometimes could not explain herself as efficiently and articulately for the students to absorb the target language. Vivian intended to incorporate

digital technology into her lectures as a part of his overall teaching strategy. She was unable to do so because of time limitations. Those obstacles could be explained due to the time period for each English lesson which only lasted for 90 minutes. In addition, both students and teachers may meet disconnecting problems via the Internet, which lengthened the waiting time for network connection. It is believed that not only Vivian's case but also teachers and students in Cubeles & Riu (2016), Sweeny (2017), Bond et al. (2018), Nguyen (2020), and Van et al. (2021), to some extent, need to overcome this challenge.

Teaching content knowledge

Vivian had previous experience teaching in English, having "taught students at different English proficiencies. Therefore, it is certain that dealing with one level of English proficiency class brought no hardship for her. Besides, this quotes her rationale for why she should take over the course:

I've studied this topic several times, and I'm sure that I fully grasp the material. In addition, those topics were common themes....

Vivian followed the curriculum and lesson plans recommended in the instruction manual. The lecture format remained the same throughout the course, starting with explaining concepts, providing examples, and encouraging students to practice. It finished off with "*a case study for students to discuss to understand how the theory works in real situations.*"

She supposed that pupils would comprehend and recall common examples. Additionally, Vivian was worried that students would not grasp the subject matter. As first-year students, they lack the appropriate vocabulary for reading texts or listening recordings in the course. She said she had to review her teaching method to find the appropriate technique to motivate students in learning English. She reported, for instance, she tried to talk more with students to explore their needs and wants. She also gave students a mid-term exam to "*refresh themselves, review the teachings, and reset their goals for their future assessments.*"

Vivian thought the lesson comprised a lot of tasks and exercises for students to complete, and she also had worries about students' involvement due to the challenge of the material. Recognizing students' exhaustion and dissatisfaction was sometimes difficult for her.

I monitor students' facial expressions and behaviors in class. When things aren't obvious, people begin to become sidetracked. When overloaded, they get fatigued and lose focus. Should I continue or not?

Such a rich curriculum has a pronounced effect on both teachers and students.

Vivian said that group work activities were not available for learners in class. She felt that group talks were valuable to participants, particularly when they lacked self-confidence in talking to the instructor. However, there was no time to do group work efficiently. However, since new students are so different from others, he did not want to promote collaboration in class groups. That echoes the findings in Wyatt et al. (2010) and Taylor & Clark (2010).

Throughout the classroom, Vivian used several instructional techniques to assist students to accomplish course goals which were demonstrated in Table 3

Table 3: Classroom observation – Summary of teaching stages

No.	Teaching stage	Activities	Objectives
1	Warm-up	Q&A: Ss were given a list of questions to answer, regarding anything that was unclear from the prior sessions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To recall important ideas and phrases to ensure that Ss understand the course material. - To encourage Ss to make question voluntarily and randomly.
2	Lead-in	Introduction: T outlined a plan for the lecture, including the lesson objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To properly educate Ss about what they will study. - To keep Ss aware of the lecture's main topics, so they could concentrate.
3	Presenting new concepts	Lecturing: Using slides sharing on Google Meet, T demonstrated how the theory and ideas work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To guarantee the comprehension of the key concepts. - To prove how they are implemented in real-world scenarios.
4	Practice	Group exercises: each S saw several examples on slides and then discussed the solutions in groups assigned in separate Breakout rooms in about 2 or 5 minutes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To have Ss apply the theory to do the exercise or discuss the situation.
5	Wrap-up	Some groups reported their responses randomly and gave additional comprehensive explanations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To ensure that they understood the theory and could apply it in practice.

Participation was greater in group practice sessions. Almost everyone understood what their peers were saying. However, debates required short answers with logical reasons. As a result, the researcher could hear the students replying but not answering their questions. Students were always encouraged to ask questions when they did not understand. Some rear participants would search for keywords and would write in their books. They accordingly identified themselves as information seekers on the Internet when they were encouraged to use Google or Wiki. Students' willingness to continue discovering learning materials on websites is close to journals by Ernst

and Moye (2013), Flanagan and Richardson (2013) and Delfino (2019), Van et al. (2021).

In conclusion, Vivian was well-versed in her subject and teaching experience, therefore increasing her confidence. She adjusted lessons using the syllabus and teacher's books. To help pupils follow her lectures, she offered examples and suggestions on how to better understand the subjects. The curriculum was too large and lacked enough time for pupils to be interested. This was not a consideration when creating the lessons. Teachers seldom prompted their students. Attending the practices, they primarily observed the teacher speaking.

The use of digital techniques

Vivian said that digital technology gave her assistance during teaching. She showed PowerPoint presentations to students through Slide-Sharing on Google Meet to contain the goals of each session, as well as explain and define key knowledge in each unit.

Table 4: Vivian's use of digital techniques to support her teaching

Digital technology	The Internet		LMS	Powerpoint	Computer software
	Websites	Google/ Wiki			
Accessing information	V	V	V		
Presenting information				V	
Processing digital objects					V
Gaming or interactive programmes	V			V	V
Communicating, collaborating or engaging	V		V		

Vivian had ready access to many online resources. She felt that PowerPoint presentations effectively showed the target knowledge. She found a number of views on the topic that could be found online and offline by using web-based tools. She believed that the incorporation of technology gadgets might both help lecturers and students. Participants administered their tests on computers with the Internet. She arranged a time for students to sit the exams and take the Google-form online test. Vivian utilized a monitor computer to curb student submissions and results. She offered additional clarification by saying:

Printing expenses are saved by doing tests on computers, even on students' mobile phones with the Internet. Students supported having computer-based exams since the results are available quickly. I did not have to grade the test, but I chose tests from the test bank.

All in all, students were hopeful about digital assessment. Such effectiveness of utilizing digital techniques was recorded during students' test-taking time online via Kahoot in Nguyen (2020) or individuals completing the poll in Pham (2020). Students' increased sense of taking

technology as their regular learning devices helped them build up more enthusiasm in classroom collaboration (Coates, 2015; Nguyen 2020; Pham, 2020; Van et al., 2021).

Besides, Vivian believed that the LMS at the institution was under-employed. She contacted students via the LMS to provide assignments or important information. She also posted the curriculum on the LMS, so that students knew the course goals. Vivian also had to use email and Zalo app to connect with students because of a technological issue. Students, for example, found it easier to follow the updated information because instant messaging or notifications continuously appeared on their digital devices whenever the lecturer posted. However, she felt that the technique was ineffective since the lecturer uploaded lessons containing material that she could not reflect on Google Meet meeting. Participation in the students' online group discussion took time. However, many lecturers at UNETI use LMS because of the university's mandate. She stated that LMS use was incentivized via bonus points given to instructors in their performance system. For her, she did not think that students comprehended online courses as clearly as face-to-face lessons. The systems were sometimes inconvenient, and some students found it difficult to get access to it.

The students

Table 5 below shows that the overall involvement of students at UNETI was high, with a mean score of 2.75.

Table 5: Summary of the level of Student Engagement

Dimensions of student engagement	Mean score	Qualitative interpretation (QI)
Behavioral engagement	2.80	High
Cognitive engagement	2.67	High
Emotional engagement	2.79	High
Average	2.75	High

Ranking:

1.0 – 1.7: very low (VL)	1.8 – 2.5: low (L)	2.6 – 3.3: high (H)	3.4 – 4.0: very high (VH)
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In detail, the highest mean score of 2.80 was behavioral engagement among its three dimensions. It was followed by emotional engagement with a mean score of 2.79, and the lowest-ranked item was cognitive engagement with a mean score of 2.67. The following table illustrated more specific information among each dimension of students' engagement.

Table 6: Level of Student Behavioral Engagement

Related indicators	Statements	Mean	QI	Overall mean
Behavioral engagement	1. Participate in class discussions.	1.60	VL	2.80
	2. Answer the questions in class actively.	2.12	L	
	3. Do all exercises or homework.	2.33	L	
	4. Take note in class.	3.67	VH	
	5. Get good grades.	2.10	L	
	6. Receive prompt written or oral feedback on your performance.	3.28	H	
	7. Attend every class.	3.89	VH	
	8. Attend class without completing exercises or homework.	2.45	L	
	9. Make sure to study on a regular basis.	3.46	VH	
	10. Do well on a test.	3.08	H	

In terms of behavioral involvement shown in Table 6, attending every class was rated at the highest level with a mean of 3.89; after that was the mean score at 3.67 was students' taking notes in class and followed indicator of 3.46 was students' certainty of studying on a regular basis. It reasonably aligned with what was observed in every class when most of students had to attend the class due to the university's regulations on students' attendance and absence. Besides, according to the teacher, they were obliged to write down the knowledge into their notebooks in each class. Moreover, from the observed information, every student who presented or did exercises in the class received the teacher's immediate feedback. In contrast to the three high indicators, the three lowest-rated ones were getting good marks (2.10), answering the questions in class in an active manner (2.12), and doing all assigned exercises (2.33). This might possibly be caused by students' experiences with English learning and their learning style or habits. As reported through the teacher's post-interview, Vivian said that not many students were into learning English. They were forced to complete English credits because it was a compulsory subject at UNETI. This also reflects the claim in Ho (2020) that students spent similar amounts of time when they studied with either digital techniques or flashcards. Concerning the great frequency of use of technology nevertheless, Ho (2019) indicated that participants' learning frequency was greater and brought more usefulness on learning speed, long-term memorization, and language development rather than paper-based learning materials.

That corroborates the positive findings in this study when students reported they did well on a test (3.08).

Table 7: Level of Student Cognitive Engagement

Related indicators	Statements	Mean	QI	Overall mean
Cognitive engagement	11. Present in class	3.78	VH	2.67
	12. Prepare two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in.	2.03	L	
	13. Use an electronic medium to discuss or complete an assignment.	3.89	VH	
	14. Discuss ideas from lessons with class members inside classroom	2.54	H	
	15. Use emails, LMS platform, Zalo, Facebook/ Twitter/ Instagram and Google Meet to communicate with teacher	4.00	VH	
	16. Discuss grades or assignments with teacher	1.67	VL	
	17. Work harder than you thought you could do to meet teacher's standards or expectations	2.69	H	
	18. Discuss ideas from lessons with class members outside classroom	2.35	L	
	19. Think about your study and find ways to make it more interesting to you	1.87	L	
	20. Look over your notes between classes to make sure that you understand the materials	2.47	L	
	21. Apply the learning materials to your life	2.21	L	
	22. Find ways to make the lessons relevant to your life	2.53	H	

Regarding students' cognitive engagement, it could be excluded from Table 7 that this aspect was high because of the overall mean score at 2.67. The highest calculated item was students' use of emails, LMS platform, Zalo, Facebook/ Twitter/ Instagram, and Google Meet to communicate with the teacher (4.00). The second-ranked indicator was students' use of an electronic medium to discuss and complete an assignment (3.89); the third one with the mean score of 2.69 revealed students' effort to work harder to meet teacher's standards and expectations. A possible reason is that they had to study over the Google Meet application during the intervention because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, they did not have opportunities to communicate with their peers and teacher face to face. The most advantageous solution to tackle these problems was virtual communication through digital technologies. This brings positive impacts into desirable coordination with Trowler (2010), Teo (2010), Liu

(2016), and Pham (2020) when the utilization of technological advances inside the classroom contributed to students' participation. The three least items, however, were measured to be at the mean scores of 1.87, 2.03, and 2.21 significantly, interpreting students' thoughts about the study firstly and finding ways to make it more interesting to themselves, secondly their preparation two or more drafts of an assignment before turning it in; and finally applying the learning materials to their life. It is logically apparent that students could not show their autonomy or self-esteem in learning English as a foreign language. Their aim was merely to complete and pass the English subjects to move on with their academic transcripts.

Table 8: Level of Student Emotional Engagement

Related indicators	Statements	Mean	QI	Overall mean
Emotional engagement	23. Include diverse perspective in class discussion	3.28	H	2.79
	24. Work with other students on project during class.	2.68	H	
	25. Work with classmates to prepare class assignments	2.93	H	
	26. Really desire to learn the materials	2.28	L	
	27. Have fun in class	3.27	H	
	28. Be confident that you can learn and do well in class	2.97	H	
	29. Have serious conversations with classmates who are very different from your opinions	1.76	L	
	30. Talk with career plans with teacher	3.15	H	

With regards to students' emotional engagement in table 8, the average mean score was 2.79, which was reported to be high. To be illustrated, the highest-rated indicator was students' diverse perspective in-class discussion (3.28), and the second-ranked item was students' having fun in class (3.27). According to the interview with Vivian, various opinions might root from only some energetic and active students. They were claimed to participate in class discussions regularly or raise their hands voluntarily to answer the questions. In addition, regarding students' fun in class, it could be due to the application of computer games or online quizzes that she implemented in each class so as to motivate them and raise their interest in the class activities. On the other hand, students' having serious conversations with classmates was rated at only 1.76, and learners' desire to learn materials was measured at 2.28. Those items were indicated among the least frequency of students' choices. Cross-checking the observation and interview, only a few students positively joined class activities. Almost all of them were asked to express their ideas in class; therefore, they were so passive in raising their voices, although their opinions contrasted to others. Another possible explanation may be due to students getting distracted from the use of their own digital devices. Messages or notifications from social media networks might pause their concentration on class activities, which is consistent with Ho (2019), Pham (2020), and Van et al. (2021).

Conclusion and recommendations

This study looks at the impacts of digital methods in an EFL class at UNETI. From the analysis, students correspondingly used digital techniques at a high level in their learning English process, and so did the teacher who shared her perceptions through interviews. From classroom observation, using computers, laptops, smartphones, search engines like Google, Wikipedia, social networks, and messaging applications, students and teachers accessed many resources to serve for studying purposes. Using technology allowed students to learn English, and it also improved their involvement in-class activities. Learning networks provided an added incentive environment for learners. Students believe that digital methods are important for improving their English learning.

The researcher also believes that this study will have a huge impact on the pedagogical area of using technology in teaching and learning English. It seems instructors that are interested in the linked subject may use their teaching techniques to satisfy the curriculum and syllabus. Technological resources allow teachers to make adjustments. Experienced educators should use digital technologies to assist learners in acquiring new information, enhance their critical thinking, and engage them in collaborative activities. Secondly, universities should prioritize creating a student-centered learning environment that increases students' intellectual capacity and autonomy. As such, Vietnamese education, especially at the higher levels, is adopting technology-based teaching.

Besides, from the basis analyzed in this research, it is necessary to require more studies of digital approaches on diverse majors, such as English lecturers with various backgrounds and teaching styles. Thus, these findings may be supplemented by further researches, which includes additional parties and institutions. Furthermore, both language and content should be investigated to comprehend the use of technology in class better. Other testing or experimental tools may be added to discover the digital learning environment.

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Biodata

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The Semantic Features of Collective Nouns in English

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ABSTRACT

The vocabulary, particularly nouns, is considerably more important in communication. Collective nouns are kinds of nouns depending on their meaning. They are distinct terms used to describe a particular collection of things and play a significant role in English. However, it is very difficult for non-native speakers to recall all of the specific nouns used to characterize each category of things. For instance, a "bunch of lions" could be taken advantage of instead of "a pride of lions"; however, it would detract from the language's beauty. Thus, in order to understand and utilize collective nouns accurately, learners must be familiar with their semantic characteristics. The research is related to the semantic characteristics of collective nouns that are utilized to teach vocabulary to non-English major students at the University of Foreign Language Studies – The University of Danang. The researchers used descriptive and analytic techniques to comprehensively describe the semantic characteristics of 100 English collective nouns chosen at random from renowned short tales. In terms of semantic characteristics, collective nouns in English from gathered data are utilized to represent humans, animals, and objects semantically. Additionally, this research sought to hypothesize certain metrics for more efficient teaching and acquiring English vocabulary. In conclusion, the results of this research have many significant implications for future English practice and therefore clearly contribute to the development of English vocabulary acquisition and teaching.

Keywords:

vocabulary, English, collective nouns, semantic features

Introduction

Among apparent difficulties in mastering English vocabulary, the comprehension and use of collective nouns appear to be a demanding task for learners of English. The term "collective noun" refers to a collection of things, people, animals, or ideas that form a single notion or entity. While a collective noun does not refer to a single individual or object inside a group, it

is treated as a single concept, entity, or thing. It is also regarded as a "group noun." Remembering this kind of noun is really challenging for non-English major students. Then, students try to memorize them in various ways, such as doing follow-up exercises and rote learning, or even some students avoid using them. Actually, the multiple meanings of English collective nouns in different contexts may cause problems for learners. Therefore, an alternative approach to teaching and learning English collective nouns are needed for Vietnamese teachers and learners of English. According to Bui (2021), Chau (2021), and Tran (2021), students often have problems when they use nouns or collocations in their speech or writing. They have spent years learning English, but they still face difficulties in both writing and speaking (Candilas, 2021). The students' anxiety might be one of the problems that lead them to this issue (Pabro-Maquidato, 2021, Chau, 2021). Hoang (2021) states that different students might have different styles of learning a second language, and each student has different learning strategies. As can be evidently seen from the observation, the researchers recognized that a typical strategy for teaching and collective learning nouns is that the teachers provide learners with the semantic features of collective nouns in English.

Apart from the aforementioned, many research studies on collective nouns have been conducted; nevertheless, very few in-depth studies focusing only on the grammatical features of collective nouns have been conducted. The semantic description of collective nouns seems to be overlooked and has not been paid attention to as expected.

The researchers decided to conduct a study entitled "**The Semantic Features of Collective Nouns in English**" for all of these reasons. This study aims to determine the semantic properties of collective nouns and their consequences for teaching and learning English vocabulary. Furthermore, it is anticipated that this research would assist English learners in developing a better understanding of how to utilize collective nouns to convey their thoughts effectively and adequately.

Literature review

After examining the relevant literature, the researchers found that many writers, including Rodney and Pullum, Downing, have addressed collective nouns. Rodney and Pullum (2005) noted that a collective noun could not be used in isolation in English, both in terms of syntactic characteristics and semantics. It is preceded by the indefinite article a/an and followed by a prepositional phrase that contains the preposition "of" and a noun or a noun phrase in plural forms. Collective nouns serve as head nouns in this arrangement. A collective noun may be pre-modified with adjectives as a noun; for example, "a chaotic throng of people." In particular, unlike other common countable nouns, collective nouns cannot be employed in plural forms in the same way as other common nouns, despite indicating plurality semantically—conjugate collective nouns with either a single or plural verb. Additionally, the collective noun may be employed independently when it serves as an anaphoric reference to the antecedent to which it refers.

In the meanwhile, Downing (2015) expresses a fresh perspective on collective nouns. According to him, the indefinite article "a" precedes, and the preposition follows a collective noun grammatically. Angela substituted the term "counter" for "collective noun." There have

been a lot of studies conducted on collective nouns. Magnus (2001) also agrees in American English, British English, and Australian English with collective nouns. He demonstrated that many variables, including geographical and stylistic characteristics and syntactic, semantic, and lexical constraints, interact to determine the single and plural targets of collective nouns in English. He drew the conclusion that semantic influence on verb agreement with collective nouns appears to be decreasing in British English. A few verbs demand singular agreement, but for the most part, the choice is mostly affected by the noun's propensity for singular or plural agreement.

Besides, De Vires (2018) explained why a single or plural verb should be used with collective nouns in "*Collective Nouns*." He claimed that collective nouns combine properties associated with singularity or 'one-ness' and properties associated with plurality on all levels of grammar (lexical-conceptual, morph syntactic, and semantic). Because of this, they provide a window into the various factors that influence the expression and interpretation of numbers. Meanwhile, Petra (2014) examined how Swedes were writing in English to construct numbers concord with collective nouns. He concluded that singular concord seems to be more frequent with collective nouns in Sweden.

However, each of the preceding research focused on a single feature of collective nouns: concord or agreement. As a result, more research into the semantic properties of collective nouns in English and their application to the teaching of English vocabulary is worthwhile.

Research Questions

To accomplish the research aims, the survey sought to answer the following research questions.

1. "What are semantic features of collective nouns in English?"
2. "What are measures for teaching and learning English vocabulary?"

Methods

Pedagogical Setting

To simplify the study of English collective noun semantic features, the researchers focused on collective nouns in the form of a collocation of "a/an collective noun + of - phrase" in short stories. Additionally, this research sought to hypothesize certain metrics for teaching and acquiring English vocabulary more effectively.

Design of the Study

To accomplish the investigation's objectives, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to address the study issues. The qualitative method is used to describe and analyze data in order to ascertain the semantic properties of collective nouns. Their occurrence was calculated using a quantitative method.

Initially, the descriptive approach was utilized to explain the semantic properties of English collective nouns comprehensively. Second, the analytic approach was utilized to explain and defend a certain trait or aspect of English collective nouns. Finally, several strategies for vocabulary teaching and learning were discussed.

In summary, the techniques listed above serve as recommendations for performing the study.

However, depending on the study's objectives, descriptive and analytic techniques were often employed.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this research, 100 English short tales are randomly selected. The data for collective nouns are analyzed and categorized using the samples obtained. They are then characterized and evaluated using semantic characteristics found in English short tales. The researchers then synthesis the data and compared the number of semantic characteristics associated with collective nouns used in English short tales. Additionally, a more thorough investigation is conducted to ascertain the semantic characteristics of English group nouns. Tables are used to simplify the presenting and comparing process. Finally, a conclusion is made based on the data analysis results.

Results/Findings and Discussion

Collective nouns indicating individuals fall into two broad categories: groups of people who collaborate with one another and groups of people in general. Following the selection of 100 samples, the following table illustrates the findings:

Table 1. A summary of English Collective Nouns used for People (Grammar-monster, 2018)

	Collective nouns	Head nouns	Number	Percent
Collective nouns denoting a group of people working together	A choir	ladies	3	8.3%
		singers		
	A company	soldiers	2	5.6%
		actors		
	A group	strident queens	4	11.1%
		doctors		
	A crew	sailors	1	2.8%
	A cast	actors	2	5.6%
	A troupe	performers	1	2.8%
A team	players	4	11.1%	
A class	students	2	5.6%	
Collective nouns denoting a group of people in general	A group	little fellows	4	11.1%
		old men		
	A crowd	villagers	2	5.6%
	A bunch	people	2	5.6%
		kids		
	A tribe	people	2	5.6%
		angry natives		
	A mob	thieves, robbers, whores	3	8.3%
	A circle	friends	1	2.8%
	A party	friends	1	2.8%
A bevy	girls	1	2.8%	
	beauties	1	2.8%	
Total			36	100%

As the table indicates, collective nouns used to refer to individuals are most often found in two categories: a group of people who work together and a group of people in general.

It can be seen that “a circle”, “a party”, “a bevy”, “a crew” and “a troupe” share the same lowest percentages at 2.1%. “A tribe”, “bunch”, “a crowd”, “a cast” and “a company” have slightly higher figures, but the highest figure is for “a group” and “a team”, at almost 11.1%.

Indeed, "a group" is the most often used collective noun and may be employed in the majority of circumstances. In addition, there are a variety of collective nouns that may be used to represent a group of individuals congregating, including “a choir”, “a company”, “a crowd”, “a bunch”. These collective nouns, on the other hand, cannot be employed arbitrarily. Rather than that, they must be accompanied by a particular word that corresponds to their meaning.

Moreover, while portraying a group of individuals, English authors seem to take into account the group's social position, age, and attitude. For instance, when referring to a group of children, English authors use the phrase "a lot of children." By comparison, “a company of troops” refers to a group of soldiers. Collective nouns may effectively convey the writers' social standing or attitude toward their characters (Collective nouns, n.d.; Vocabulary, 2015).

Table 2. A summary of English Collective Nouns used for Animals

	Collective Nouns	Head Nouns	Number	Percent
Collective Nouns denoting mammals and marsupials	A herd	cows	3	10%
		red deer		
	A team	horses	1	3.3%
	A string	horses	1	3.3%
Collective Nouns denoting birds	A flock	birds	3	10%
	A gaggle	geese	2	6.7%
	A skein	geese	1	3.3%
	A raft	ducks	1	3.3%
	A brace	ducks	1	3.3%
	A flight	birds	1	3.3%
	A rookery	penguins	1	3.3%
Collective Nouns denoting fish	A school	fish	4	12.1%
		goldfish		
	A shoal	sperm whales	1	3.3%
	A troop	dogfish	1	3.3%
A swarm	eels	1	3.3%	
Collective Nouns denoting reptiles and amphibians	A pit	snakes	1	3.3%
	A nest	snakes	1	3.3%
	A den	snakes	1	3.3%
Collective Nouns denoting invertebrates	An army	caterpillars	2	6.7%
		ants		
	A colony	ants	1	3.3%
	A hive	bees	2	6.7%
Total			30	100%

In terms of animals, out of 100 samples are taken from English short tales, 30 instances include collective nouns indicating a group of animals, with birds accounting for the majority (33.2 percent). Following this figure are collective nouns for fish (22 percent). Collective nouns indicating mammals and marsupials and collective nouns signifying invertebrates both account for 16.7 percent of the total.

In terms of mammals and marsupials, "a herd" possesses the highest percentage at 10%, whereas "a team" and "a string" also share the lowest figure, at almost 3.3%. When it comes to birds, around 10% of collective nouns used are "a flock," while the figure of "a gaggle" is slightly lower at 6.7%. Moreover, "A raft", "a brace", "a skein", "a flight" and "a rookery" have the lowest figure with only 3.3 percent of the total.

Regarded as collective nouns denoting fish, "a school" is commonly used for many fish in the sea and has the largest percentage, with 12.1% of the total, while the proportion of "a shoal" and "a swarm" approximately stands at the same level. Concerning reptiles and amphibians, "a pit", "a net" and "a den" are both collective nouns used for denoting a group of snakes moving in the same direction. However, each collective noun only appears once in the sample. Finally, in respect of invertebrates, "an army" and "a hive" account for the same rate with 6.7%, whereas the collective noun "a colony" makes up for only half of this amount.

The table above also demonstrates that the English collective nouns for animals may be divided into a variety of categories based on the creatures' characteristics. In the context of animals, the collective word "a herd" is often used. Typical instances are "a herd of cows" and "a herd of deer." Meanwhile, the English refer to a group of birds soaring in the sky as "a flock of birds."

Furthermore, a group of fish swimming in the water refers to "a school of fish" or "a shoal of fish". The term "a swarm" refers to a big group of insects traveling in the same direction. Furthermore, there are many additional collective nouns that may be used to characterize each animal kind.

Table 3. A summary of English Collective Nouns used for Things (EnglishStudyPage, 2018).

	Collective Nouns	Head Nouns	Number	Percent
Collective Nouns denoting flowers	A bouquet	flowers	1	2.9%
	A bunch	flowers	2	5.9%
	A basket	flowers	2	5.9%
Collective Nouns denoting vegetables	A sack	potatoes	1	2.9%
	A bunch	carrots	3	8.8%
Collective Nouns denoting fruits	A bunch	grapes bananas	3	8.8%
	A cluster	grapes	2	5.9%
	A basket	fruits	1	2.9%
Collective Nouns denoting food and drink	A bowl	rice	2	5.9%
	A glass	water	2	5.9%
		milk		
	A bottle	champagne	1	2.9%
	A carton	orange juice	1	2.9%
	A cup	coffee	1	2.9%
	A box	cereal	1	2.9%
A dish	eggs	1	2.9%	
Collective Nouns denoting objects	A pile	money	1	2.9%
	A wad	notes	1	2.9%
	A tube	toothpaste	1	2.9%
	A bunch	key	1	2.9%
Collective nouns denoting clothes	A suit	clothes	1	2.9%
	A pile		2	5.9%
Collective Nouns denoting vehicle	A fleet	ships	3	8.8%
		taxis		
		boats		
Total			34	100%

The table above summarizes the frequency with which English collective nouns denote things that occur. There are 34 instances of collective nouns being used for objects in the study's 100 samples. This figure is subdivided into seven subcategories: flowers (14.7 percent), vegetables (11.7 percent), fruits (17.6 percent), food and drink (26.3 percent), objects (11.6 percent), clothing (8.8 percent), and vehicles (8.8 percent).

Things have a range of collective nouns, including flowers, vegetables, fruits, food and drinks, objects, clothing, vehicles. On a semantic level, the English collective nouns for flowers include "a bunch of flowers" and "a bouquet of flowers." While the terms are frequently used interchangeably, some florists believe that a bunch is a loosely tied and uncomplicated arrangement of flowers, whereas a bouquet is a more carefully arranged

arrangement of flowers based on color, composition, height, and other factors, and is frequently wrapped in paper and tied with a ribbon.

There are no standard group nouns for the word "vegetables" in the English language. Numerous collective nouns are used to refer to particular types of vegetables, for example, a bunch of carrots or a hill of beans.

There are distinct collective nouns used to refer to certain types of fruits when it comes to fruits. For instance, a bunch of bananas and a bunch of grapes are referred to as "a bunch of bananas" and "a bunch of grapes," respectively. However, "a basket" is the most often used collective word for a collection of various fruits and flowers.

English collective nouns indicate food and drink by using containers such as a bowl, a dish, a bottle, or a box. Collective nouns for objects are similarly diverse in the English language since they vary according to the items referred to. The collective noun "vehicles" may be followed by "a fleet," for example, "a fleet of automobiles." The collective nouns for clothing may refer to "a suit" or "a pile."

Moreover, as shown in the previous tables, "a bunch" is a frequent collective noun that may refer to a group of people, vegetables, flowers, fruits, or other objects. "A group of youngsters", "a group of carrots", "a group of flowers", "a group of bananas", or "a group of keys" are all examples of groups.

In response to our study question, "What are the semantic characteristics of English collective nouns?" The present investigation's statistical findings indicate that collective nouns in English are used to describe humans, animals, and objects semantically. Collective nouns indicating individuals are classified into two subtypes: those signifying a group of people who work together and those denoting a group of people in general. The English language uses a variety of collective nouns to refer to a group of individuals who work together, depending on the job's qualities, such as "a staff of employers", "a cast of actors", or "a crew of sailors". By contrast, when English speakers refer to a group of people in general, they consider the social position, age, and attitude of the individuals they want to mention in order to employ the appropriate collective nouns for each topic and situation.

Animals, as a collective noun in English, may be divided into a variety of categories based on their characteristics. In the context of animals, the collective noun "a herd" is often used. Meanwhile, the English use the term "a flock" to refer to a group of birds flying in the sky. Additionally, a group of fish that swim in the water is regarded as "a school" or "a shoal". The term "swarm" refers to a huge group of insects. The collective nouns that refer to things come in a variety of forms, including flowers, vegetables, fruits, food and drink, objects, clothes, vehicles.

For the second research question, "What are measures for teaching and learning English vocabulary?" The study suggests that understanding semantic features will help learners comprehend and remember the contextual meanings of collective nouns. For teachers of English, findings from our investigations can provide an alternative approach to teaching English collective nouns. Moreover, it is observed from our study that, although English collective nouns are multiform, teachers can provide learners with an effective cognitive tool to deal with problems in learning vocabularies which can facilitate learners' confidence and independence in the classroom.

Obviously, the findings of the research prove that applying the characteristics of each group of collective nouns to teaching vocabulary related to collective nouns can effectively improve students' vocabulary memorization and engagement. The main reason is that English collective nouns would be easier to remember if they were categorized into small groups depending on their specific features. Besides, understanding the semantic features of collective nouns can also help students apply them in different contexts easily and more effectively (Rodney & Pullum, 2005). Thus, it is necessary to master the semantic features of English collective nouns in order to reach the desired goal of teaching and learning vocabulary.

From what has been presented above, the researchers recognize that understanding the true meaning of each set of collective nouns is the first technique for students learning English vocabulary connected to collective nouns (Magnus, 2001). By deeply understanding words, English users can make their vocabulary grow exponentially. Instead of memorizing words, try to understand them by looking at their semantic features to correctly use the head nouns attached to the collective nouns. Next, each student should maintain a personal lexicon when learning English vocabulary in general and collective nouns in particular (De Vires, 2018). By retaining a customized list of learned terms, students will have a convenient reference for subsequent study. Students are highly likely to wish to review recent vocabulary terms, and maintaining them in their own list is much more effective than referring to the dictionary each time. There are many methods for English speakers to maintain their own unique list of collective nouns. However, one option is to make a table and divide it into many groups of collective nouns. Furthermore, teachers can also design many worksheets in order for students to practice using collective nouns in different contexts. By doing this, students can improve their vocabulary effectively.

Compared to the previous research on collective nouns, the findings and pedagogical implications of the present study can have a significant contribution to learning and teaching English collective nouns effectively. To begin, this study has explored a new aspect of collective nouns, the semantic features, which have not been discussed before. In fact, the previous studies of many researchers, as mentioned in the literature review, have helped learners determine the subject-verb agreement with collective nouns. This paper aims to lay a basic theoretical foundation for categorizing collective nouns and understanding the characteristics of each group of collective nouns. As a result, it may help English learners remember collective nouns easily and effectively.

Secondly, as consulted from the literature review, there are some authors giving the definitions and the grammatical features of English collective nouns. However, mastering the grammatical features does not mean that students can use these kinds of nouns in specific contexts. Therefore, this research is expected to fill in this gap by providing the lexical choice of English collective nouns in particular situations.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the action research, the following conclusions and implications are made. First, regarding semantic characteristics, we use English collective nouns from our gathered data to semantically represent humans, animals, and objects. Collective nouns indicating individuals are classified into two subtypes: those signifying a group of people who work together and those denoting a group of people in general. Animals, as a collective noun in English, may be divided into a variety of categories based on their characteristics. The collective nouns that refer to things come in a variety of forms, including flowers, vegetables, and fruits; food and drink; objects; and clothes and vehicles.

On the basis of the semantic characteristics of English collective nouns just discussed, certain consequences for teaching and collective learning nouns are also discovered. At first, this research will serve as a valuable resource for instructors. It provides the instructor with working knowledge or comprehension of collective nouns in general and the semantic characteristics of English collective nouns. Understanding the semantic characteristics of collective nouns in-depth enables instructors to be more confident and adaptable when teaching pupils how to learn collective nouns successfully. Furthermore, the findings of this study provide some linguistic characteristics of collective nouns and assist teachers in teaching writing skills, as teachers who are well versed in the semantic attributes of collective nouns can assist students in expressing their ideas logically and smoothly.

Additionally, this research will be very beneficial to language learners. A firm grasp of collective nouns enables students to expand their vocabularies and provides them with a solid foundation for improving their reading and writing skills, which may be needed in their curriculum or future employment. In fact, pupils' papers are often boring as a result of their repetitious features. Students seem to employ repeated phrases to describe groups of people, objects, or animals because they are unfamiliar with the collective nouns that may readily be substituted. Thus, instructors may assist students in expanding their vocabulary in order to increase their awareness of using collective nouns in writing and speaking. Additionally, by identifying the collocation of collective nouns or the way words mix to form a collective noun, students will be more likely to retain the vocabulary and therefore utilize it in reading comprehension, essay writing, and fluent and fluid speaking.

To summarize, the results of this research have many significant implications for future English practice and therefore undoubtedly contribute to the development of English learners' ability to communicate in English.

However, the study is constrained by a scarcity of reference materials and a shortage of linguistic competence. The study analyzes the semantic properties of collective nouns in short stories written in English. Some crucial features of collective nouns have been removed, including syntactic and pragmatic characteristics. Moreover, since the collective nouns studied in this thesis were culled from English short stories, the study cannot include all collective nouns present in English and other languages.

As a consequence, more systematic research is necessary to examine this possibility. Firstly, an investigation into translation procedures of Vietnamese collective nouns into English would be highly recommended so that Vietnamese learners of English can have a general

understanding of the similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese. Besides, a study of pragmatic features of collective nouns in English and Vietnamese should also be conducted.

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Biodata

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Challenges in learning listening comprehension via Microsoft Teams among English majors at Van Lang University

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: listening comprehension, E-learning, Microsoft Teams, students' perception, Vietnamese EFL context

The aim of this study is to look into the listening comprehension issues that third-year students in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Van Lang University have while learning through Microsoft Teams. A total of 135 junior students were involved in this research. The paper used a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview as the key research tools to gather data to resolve the research problems. The study's findings show that most listening comprehension issues encountered when studying with Microsoft Teams fall into the following categories: digital literacy, psychological, listener factors, technology, English ability, tasks and activities, learning environment. The findings also indicate that while the students are conscious of the advantages of using E-learning, they do not enjoy it. Based on the study's findings, pedagogical implications for teachers and students in teaching and learning listening comprehension via Microsoft Teams are suggested.

1. Introduction

When English has become the global language in the twenty-first century, teaching and learning English skills is more important than ever. Even though some educators argue that speaking is the most important skill, students' ability to acquire a second language is dependent on their ability to listen (Kurita, 2012; Rost, 2001; Vandergrift, 2007). Listening is crucial in human existence, according to Hedge (2000), and people spend 9 percent of their time writing, 16 percent reading, 30 percent speaking, and 45 percent listening while talking, illustrating the importance of listening in the communication process. As a result, it's impossible to overlook the importance of listening. However, listening has been identified as possibly the most difficult skill to master in L2 (Renukadevi, 2014; Vandergrift, 2004; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

In addition, online learning or E-learning has been one of the most sought-after fields in the latest generations. Nonetheless, so far, it has been predicted to be playing an important role shortly of education. E-learning is crucial to the long-term strategy, according to 69.1% of top academic executives (Babson Survey Research Group, 2012). Undoubtedly, E-learning has become a global phenomenon. From 2012 to 2018, at Arizona State University, the number of students who graduate with online degrees increased nearly 600% to more than 7,000 annually. The number of programs rose from 33 to more than 170 (Levine, 2019). E-learning can be defined in a variety of instances. Few academics may argue that E-learning indicates taking courses online using technology to access course materials from mobile devices. However, most experts believe that E-learning is a medium of communication for teachers and students to communicate, interact and collaborate.

In Vietnam, English is frequently taught as a compulsory topic at both secondary and high school. Grammatical structures, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and translation abilities are the main goals of these students' English classes. The importance of listening appears to be overlooked in the curriculum. As a result, when these students are introduced to audio content at a later stage in their education, they struggle to develop the requisite listening skills. At Van Lang University (VLU), in an attempt to help English major students develop their English listening comprehension skills, Microsoft Teams has been used as a teaching and learning platform. However, the vast majority of major English students at this university lack acknowledgment of this software. Moreover, although E-learning can be a magnificent alternative in contrast to traditional teaching methods, some concerns must be tackled before applying E-learning techniques. Based on this background, this research will be carried out in an attempt to explore the challenges in studying English listening comprehension via Microsoft Teams that major English students at VLU are facing.

2. Literature review

In the twenty-first century, E-learning has become a vital aspect of the educational system. As a result, it has been cited in a number of noteworthy studies. According to Guri-Rosenblit (2005), E-learning is the use of electronic media for a range of learning reasons, ranging from augmenting traditional classroom capabilities to fully replacing personal gatherings through the online experience. Nonetheless, she emphasizes that while the terms "remote education" and "e-learning" are commonly used interchangeably, they are not synonymous. Liao and Lu (2008) reinforce the notion by defining E-learning as education or learning achieved through the use of Web technologies. The electronic transmission of a learning, training, or education program, as stated by Li, Lau, and Dharmendran (2009), or the use of computerized technology in a little narrower context by Abbad, Morris, and de Nahlik (2009) to complete the notion of listening comprehension.

In recent years, the term E-learning is no longer a strange term. E-learning refers to the use of data and communication breakthroughs to facilitate access to online learning and teaching

resources. Clark and Mayer (2016), educational scholars, gave a valuable and more thorough definition of E-learning as resources delivered via digital devices with the goal of aiding learning.

As a result of the foregoing, it is difficult to identify a standard definition for E-learning. Some scholars define E-learning as merely providing online courses while utilizing web-based services to organize instructional and support procedures.

2.1. The Application of E-Learning in Education

According to Yang and Arjomand (1999), advances in information technology have given today's students greater educational possibilities. A number of educational institutions has acknowledged e-learning as having the ability to affect people's awareness, abilities, and achievement. E-learning is becoming increasingly significant in higher education, as can be shown.

Love and Fry (2006) stated that colleges, universities, and other higher education institutions are racing to increase online course capabilities in a rapidly increasing cyber education market. As the process of offering and supporting education has changed, the introduction and spread of a wide range of E-learning tools have led to certain alterations in academic institutions (Dublin, 2003).

Furthermore, since technology is used in many ways in education, different styles of E-learning have arisen. In his study "Evaluating the Effectiveness of the E-learning Experience in Some Universities in Saudi Arabia from Male Students' Perceptions," Algahtani (2011) revealed three various methods of employing E-learning in education, including "adjunct, blended, and entirely online." The term "adjunct E-learning" refers to a situation in which E-learning is used as a supplement to conventional classroom instruction, allowing learners to have more flexibility (Algahtani, 2011). According to Algahtani (2011) and Zeitoun (2008), Blended E-learning is a method of using E-learning in the classroom where course materials and explanations are shared across traditional and E-learning approaches. The third alternative, entirely online, does not require any traditional learning or participation in a classroom setting. The E-learning in this situation is completely self-contained, allowing the learners or students to be as independent as possible (Algahtani, 2011; Zeitoun, 2008).

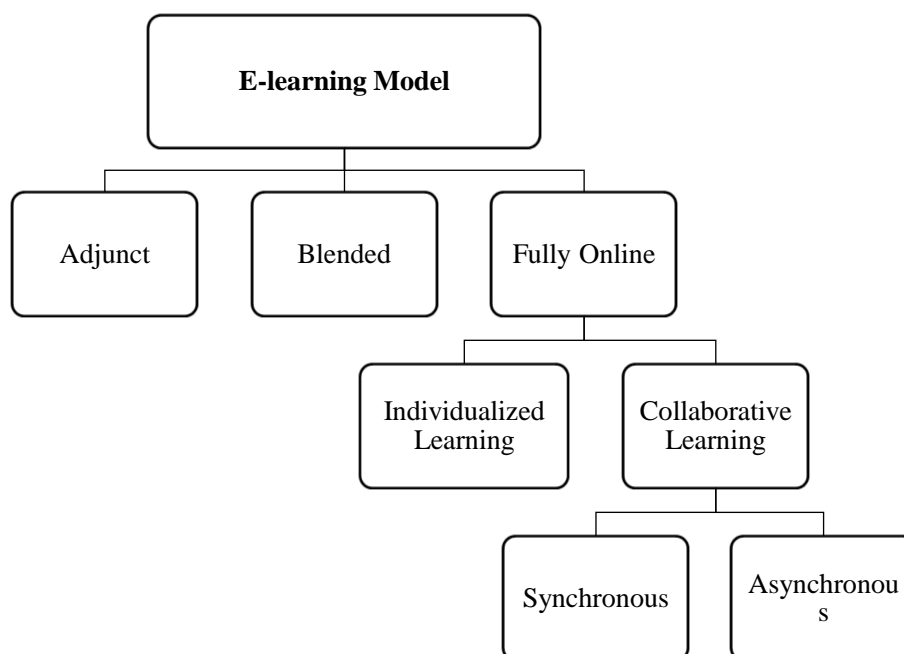


Figure 2. 1: A Model for Using E-learning in Education (Source: Algahtani (2011))

2.2. Benefits of E-learning for EFL Students

According to experts, one of the most important advantages of e-learning is its ability to navigate the acceleration of information and meet the expanding demand for education. According to Shtat (2004), E-learning provides engaging, enjoyable, motivational learning environments with a variety of sites that allow information updating, learning, and information retention and meet the needs of learners.

Rabah (2005) also said that goals could be met in the shortest amount of time with the least amount of work with E-learning. As they receive more experience from a range of specialists from various backgrounds and cultures, this will drive both teachers and students to accomplish and stay current. Khan (2005), Nguyen and Ngo (2021) commented that since E-learning environments are non-prejudiced, they are a good method of providing fair access to the knowledge world regardless of students' regions, levels, racial backgrounds, genders, or languages.

Furthermore, E-learning methods allow learners to attend educational institutions everywhere in the world. Distance learning can now take place in real-time, thanks to the Internet. Teachers may use Live stream conferencing to meet students who are unable to attend classes due to time constraints or distance (Srichanyachon, 2014).

In addition, Renes (2015) pointed out that students with family obligations and those who commute longer distances enjoy the flexibility of online delivery. Learners who manage family relationships, careers, and school discover that online education is much more suitable for them because it suits their schedules.

In summary, research indicates that if E-learning is used and implemented properly, the positive effects are greater than those of conventional learning.

2.3. Challenges of E-learning for EFL Students

Despite the advantages of the E-learning environment, this kind of technique still has several barriers. Although E-learning can improve education quality, online courses are often outfitted with dynamic capacities, for example, online activities, content downloads, video, and students who study through it must know how to click, open new windows, and download files (Wang & Chen 2007).

According to Haythornthwaite, Kazmer, Robbins, and Shoemaker (2000), individuals who were unable to form connections with others in their group in online courses/classes felt lonely and under pressure more than those who were able to make such connections. According to Davies & Graffs (2005), these challenges may have a negative impact on students' learning performance.

According to Tsai (2009), students who take online courses may face challenges that they would have never experienced during the traditional teaching and learning environment. This leads to nervousness among lower Internet-skilled learners (Ekizoglu & Ozcinar, 2010; Nguyen & Ngo, 2021). Another reason for the difficulties of E-learning is that the vast majority of learners are used to studying with peers (Crim & Reio, 2011).

Other research (Sun, 2014; Bakerson Trottier, Mansfield, 2015) also discusses students' difficulties or limitations when using E-learning. According to Sun (2014), the lack of a well-organized timetable, consistent learning, discipline, and self-motivation are some of the characteristics that contribute to E-learning failure. If instructors are unable to see students' nonverbal interactions, they are thought to be at a significant disadvantage. Bakerson, Trottier, and Mansfield (2015) believe that in an online learning environment, the lack of nonverbal clues of uncertainty on a student's face will be a notable difficulty for both students and teachers. They feel that teachers should allow more time for students to be evaluated from the start in online learning.

Ahmad (2016) discovered that EFL learning, which requires a lot of training before it can be used, frequently encounters obstacles when this type of learning system is employed. The ICT (Information and Communication Technology) equipment used by teachers to teach learners who are in diverse and distant locations, for example, is frequently useless in listening sessions. This is because teachers appear to be unable to offer their pupils the greatest possible education when giving listening sessions.

Another difficulty is that some pupils' parents and students do not own a computer or an Android device, according to Wahab & Iskandar's research (2020). They are unable to face reality as a result of their illness. Furthermore, giving internet quotas is costly (Efriana, 2021). For students and parents from middle- to lower-income homes, this is a concern. They are unable to put up an internet network due to a lack of funds. Some students live in isolated

rural locations that are not linked to the internet, according to research published by Nashruddin, Alam, and Tanasy (2020). Furthermore, due to its geographical location, which is far from signal coverage, its cellular network is occasionally problematic.

In conclusion, English-language learners may face challenges due to a lack of technical capabilities, internet access, engagement, and body language. The implementation is inefficient as a result of these difficulties. Furthermore, these characteristics suggest that teachers should use more facial expressions and body language and efficient learning resources and learning instructions to create an ideal environment for students to interact and be self-motivated in an online session.

2.4. Definition of Microsoft Teams

According to Koenigsbauer (2016), corporate vice president for Microsoft 365, Microsoft Teams is a limited business correspondence stage developed by Microsoft as part of the Microsoft 365 collection of products. It's a cloud-based program that combines discussions, gatherings, documents, and applications into a unified Learning Management System (LMS).

Tsai (2018) noted in his research, which was conducted in November 2018 and included 901 respondents from various organizations across North America, that Microsoft Teams provide advantages that email does not, including visit rooms and video conferencing. He anticipates that MS Teams will grow significantly over the next few years, as 41% of organizations plan to use Microsoft Teams (up from 21% in 2016). In addition, Hubbard and Bailey (2018) agreed that Microsoft Teams can be viewed as "a single super-app that combines several different apps into one program."

According to Heath (2019) and Bui, et al (2021), Microsoft Teams is a chat and collaboration software meant to make communication and collaboration easier for small groups of people. MS Teams for Education, they explain, provides a number of features aimed at assisting educators and students. For instance, the ability to extract schedules from the school data structure and assignment management tools to aid instructors in assessing and providing feedback. Microsoft Teams is a simple and effective group collaboration environment for kids (Buchal & Songsore, 2019).

In summary, Microsoft Teams provides a number of advantages, including scheduling and conducting meetings/conferences, engaging with others through web conferences, sharing files or documents, sharing screen or desktop, communicating in the chatting box, and recording the meeting/conferencing, and so on. Microsoft Teams is an obvious choice for online teaching and learning.

2.5. Students' Attitude towards E-Learning

A number of studies have looked into the impact of students' emotional states on their language acquisition (Bailey, 1983; Guiora, 1983). According to Krashen (1994), some pupils were unable to contribute sufficiently due to mindset, tension, a lack of courage, and inspiration. According to Zarisky and Styles(2000), the component that contributes to online

learning achievement is affection in online learning.

According to Tait (2003) and Thuy (2021), professors who promote distance learning must focus on students' dedication in order for them to complete their degrees successfully. Affective in E-learning, according to Tsai (2009), is students' attitude toward the benefits they gain from it.

According to (Algahtani, 2011), perceptions are not solely interpretive or objective. Individuals' expectations provide a context of information that guides their understanding and behavior. Therefore, students' views or assumptions about the learning they have encountered are operationalized as their experiences of E-learning (Algahtani, 2011; Penny and Coe, 2004).

Numerous studies have shown that students' personalities, which are regarded as important components in online learning, have a substantial impact on their acceptance of online learning (Bhuasiri, Xaymoungkhoun, Zo, Rho & Ciganek, 2012).

In short, students' attitudes are extremely important in teaching and learning through E-learning. Instructors need to discover and then support students who are suffering from mental strain as well as create motivation in order to encourage the learners' participation and self-discipline.

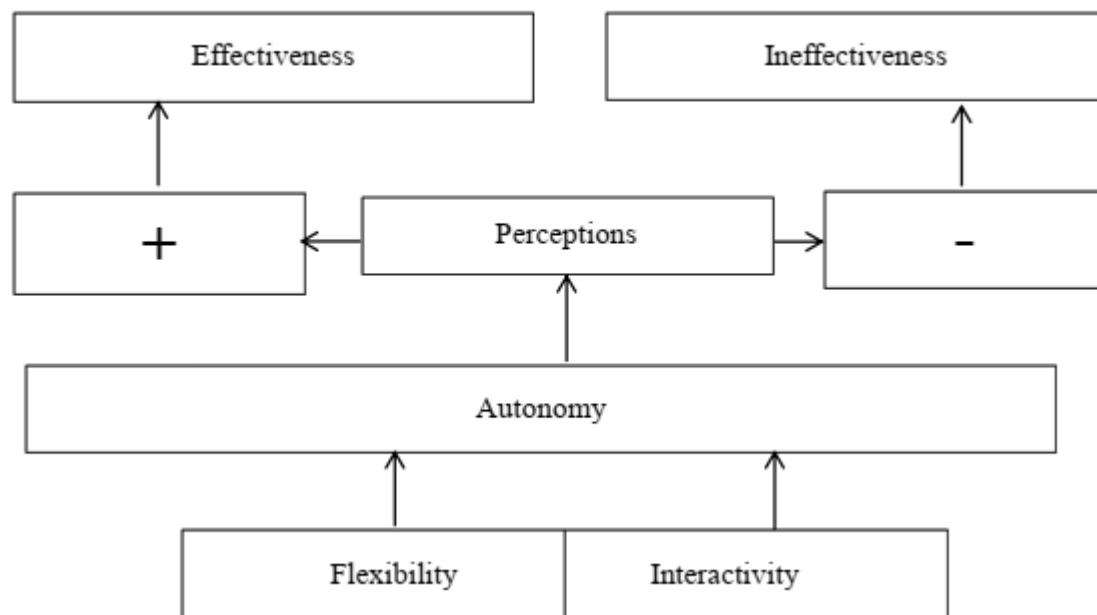


Figure 2. 1: Evaluating the Effectiveness of E-Learning (Source: Algahtani (2011))

2.6. Definition of Listening Comprehension

A number of academics have defined the phrase "listening comprehension." Listening comprehension is defined by Dirven and Oakeshott-Taylor (1984) as the result of the displaying strategy.

According to Vandergrift (1999), listening is definitely not a passive action. It's a complex, dynamic process in which the audience must distinguish between sounds, understand the jargon and grammatical structures, identify stress and intonation, and describe it both within the immediate and broader socio-social context of the word.

Hasan (2000) proved that listening comprehension is a complex process that includes meaningful interactive activity for a general understanding of the whole content. This scholar also emphasized that listening and understating should be distinguished from each other.

Listening, according to Rost (2002), is a process that involves receiving what the speaker really says, building and representing meaning, and discovering meaning through "involvement, imagination, and empathy." Furthermore, according to Friedman (2004), listening comprehension is an art, not a science. It has a lot to do with adapting cognitively to what is being stated. It isn't just about hearing; it is about much more. According to Hamouda (2013), listening comprehension is similar to an interactive cycle in which the audience is involved in the construction of meaning. Listening comprehension is also defined by Nadig (2013) as the many acts of comprehension and figuring out in the source language.

In a nutshell, listening comprehension is a multi-step process that begins by listening and finishes with a thorough knowledge of the context. It is a skill that necessitates learners' adaptability and dynamism.

2.7. Challenges of Learning Listening Comprehension

Thuy (2021) commented that teachers need to recognize the most suitable listening comprehension learning tools for students in second language learning classes. According to several scholars, there are multiple barriers that students may face during the listening comprehension process. It is the fact that listening has been ignored or poorly educated. This result may be due to the assumption that listening comprehension is a passive skill that can be taught simply by introducing students to a spoken language. (Call, 1985).

1. Speed

Underwood (1989) revealed that speed is the notable factor that makes listening passages difficult. When speakers talk quickly, students can have difficulty understanding the words in the second language. Listeners are unable to control the speed of speakers in this situation, which may cause serious issues with comprehension.

2. Accent

Goh (1999) showed a statistic that 66% of learners named a speaker's accent as one of the most notable elements that impact listener comprehension. Buck (2001) also mentioned that when listeners hear a strange accent for the first time, such as Indian English, after specializing in only American English, they will face multiple listening challenges.

3. Electronic equipment

Barriers to studying listening comprehension, according to Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, &

Tugrul Mart (2014), were the standard of electronic equipment can affect the comprehension of learners' listening. They also mentioned that students would be perplexed by terms that have multiple meanings or if they are not used appropriately in their context.

4. Anxiety

Mental states influence the production of linguistic skills either positively or negatively. Nervousness is also one of those cognitive factors that can have a great impact on listening ability due to its dominant psychological and emotional features. Melanlıoğlu(2013) and Pham (2021) assumed that throughout the pre-listening step, distracted focus and a lack of awareness about the topic to be listened to would keep the process from running smoothly, and in the post-listening stage, tension will rise if the newly acquired material cannot be correlated to previous knowledge.

5. Attitude

Among the most significant factors affecting listening comprehension is students' enthusiasm. Even the tiniest lapse of concentration will disrupt understanding when it comes to listening comprehension. It would be easier for students to absorb the listening document if the subject is valuable to them (Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, & Tugrul Mart 2014; Nguyen et al. 2021)). Besides, students' favorable or unfavorable perspectives regarding listening can shape their performance in several ways. According to Goh and Taib (2006) and Van et al. (2021), students can easily become passive during the listening process, resulting in boredom and reluctance to listening.

Overall, students must cope with issues such as how people recognize, speed, accent, the consistency of electronic devices, depression, and attitude when studying listening comprehension skills. These factors should be carefully considered in order to assist students in improving and developing this specific skill.

2.8 Related research

Attitudes of English Foreign Language Learners toward Electronic Learning (E-Learning)

Canchola conducted research titled "Indigenous Students' Attitudes toward Learning English through a Virtual Program: A Study in a Colombian Public University," which followed other academics' footsteps (2010). This study aimed to look into the attitudes of indigenous students in the ALEX Program at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia about virtual modality. This study included two major participants who took an English virtual course in the ALEX Program during the second semester of 2008 and 20 other students from various undergraduate programs. Sixteen of the twenty students polled were enrolled in a face-to-face course, three were enrolled in an intensive English course, and two were enrolled in a virtual English course. Surprisingly, none of the students who responded to the poll expressed an interest in virtual learning. The high quality of English in the texts they must employ, they claim, is the explanation.

Rojabi did another study titled "Exploring EFL Students' Perception of Online Learning using

Microsoft Teams: University Level in Indonesia" (2020). Rojabi used Microsoft teams to explore students' views about online learning in this research paper. At Open University, the study was done with 28 sixth-semester students (Universitas Terbuka-UPBJJ Jember). In order to learn about students' opinions of online learning from two perspectives: students' interaction and students' learning environment, a 16-item questionnaire was issued and collected. Google Forms was used to deliver the questionnaire to 28 students. After finishing all of the materials in an online class through Microsoft Teams, the students completed the study once. Overall, most participants had a favorable impression of the students' learning environment in an online class after examining the results. Despite this, 46% of students disagreed that teachers can use Microsoft Teams to help them engage and cooperate more effectively. Rojabi also proposed that teachers provide some interesting activities or simple assignments for students to engage in, communicate with, and collaborate with one another.

Difficulties of Listening Comprehension Skill in Second Language (L2) Learning

The study "A Study of English Listening Problems and Business Listening Proficiency at Bangkok University" was carried out by Anadapong (2011). The goal of this study was to investigate the English listening issues and proficiency of thirty Bangkok University business students. A questionnaire, an IELTS test, and an interview were utilized to collect data for this study. SPSS was used to analyze the results. According to the research, the primary source of students' listening difficulty is the listening text. However, a lack of experience with listening skills and exposure to a variety of listening resources were the most common causes of listening issues.

Nowrouzi, Tam, Zareian, and Nimehchisalem (2015) conducted a study titled "Iranian EFL Students' Listening Comprehension Problems" to investigate the listening comprehension problems of Iranian tertiary level EFL students. The goal of this research was to learn about three aspects of listening comprehension: perception (phonological and lexical concerns), parsing (syntactic and semantic issues), and usage (discourse & pragmatic problems). The participants were 70% female and were first-year EFL students at an Iranian university. They were chosen at random from three Mashhad universities. According to the findings, the majority of participants reported moderate to severe difficulties in all three areas of listening comprehension. Furthermore, students appear to overlook their problems with these two factors, implying that discourse and pragmatic issues should be given more attention.

Challenges of Learning English Listening Comprehension Skill via Mobile Learning (ML) (Google Classroom App)/ Distance Learning.

"Which components of the English language are the most difficult for distance learners?" Sai, Lin, and Belaja (2013) investigated which components of the English language were the most challenging for online students to grasp in their study. This study presented the results of research conducted on distance learners at the University Sains Malaysia's School of Distance Education (SDE) (USM). A total of 512 students who took the JUE300 English II course participated in the survey. In general, the participants reported facing the biggest difficulties in

the areas of speaking (45 percent), vocabulary (45.35 percent), grammar (41.1 percent), and listening (15.9%) while studying English at SDE USM via remote learning. Although the majority of students had no difficulty with listening comprehension, the research team pointed out that because listening is a difficult and often distracted skill, teachers must pay greater attention, especially when teaching and learning are done online. Furthermore, the study discovered that their level of responsibility and the amount of time they spent learning English had an impact on their perceptions and efficiency. For SDE distant learners, there were only five audio-recorded lectures available in the E-learning gateway, and students could choose whether or not to use them.

The Effects of Mobile Learning on Listening Comprehension Skills and Attitudes of Omani EFL Adult Learners was conducted by Al-Shamsi, Al-Mekhlafi, Al Busaidi, and Hilal (2020). This study sought to determine the impact of mobile learning (ML) on enhancing adult students' listening skills in Oman, as well as their viewpoints and the variables that remain as roadblocks to its implementation. The exam candidates, who ranged in age from 20 to 23, were from the foundation program of the Oman Military Educational Institute (MEI). The study was quasi-experimental comprised of two gatherings, a control group (used the conventional method) and an experimental group (followed by mobile-based learning). After analyzing the data from the questionnaires, it was discovered that the majority of participants were in favor of using mobile learning to improve their listening comprehension skills. Nonetheless, they highlighted a few issues related to the nature of mobile apps, cell phone screen sizes, network connections, and the suitability of listening material.

The studies above provide a close look into learners' challenges when using the E-learning method to learning listening comprehension. According to Hasan (2000), both teachers and understudies ought to be mindful of the components that contribute to their listening challenges. Once students recognize their difficulties, it would be simpler to discover the effective procedures to assist them in progress their listening comprehension. Moreover, instructors can offer assistance to their students to overcome and become superior listeners.

2.9 Research Questions

Since the most objective of this research is to discover the challenges that third-year students at Van Lang University (VLU) have to confront when studying English listening comprehension through Microsoft Teams, the researchers concentrate on the following issues:

1. What are the difficulties that major English students at Van Lang University have in studying the listening comprehension skill through Microsoft Teams?
2. What attitudes do English majors at Van Lang University have toward E-learning/ Microsoft Teams?

3. Methods

3.1 Pedagogical Setting & Participants

Van Lang University is known for its breakthrough successes in higher education, innovation, contributions to Vietnam, and going beyond a traditional university's bounds. According to Decision No.108/QĐ/VL-HĐT 18th, August 2020 of Chairman of the Van Lang University's Council about Mission, Vision, Core values, by 2030, the university aspiration aims to be one of Asia's most admired young universities. The university has maintained its fundamental mission of educating people who have an inspirational impact on society with a core value of Morality - Will - Creativity since its inception 26 years ago.

The participants of this study are junior students at Van Lang University's Faculty of Foreign Languages. Moreover, due to the impossibility of studying an entire population (all students at the university), the researchers decide to apply a Simple Random Sampling (SRS) method. Because it is the most straightforward and practical technique to collect data properly, the researchers found that the SRS method is the best strategy for determining the study sample. The research was conducted during the second semester of the study year 2020-2021 at Van Lang University's Faculty of Foreign Languages. A total of 135 third-year students from Van Lang University's Faculty of Foreign Languages took part in the study. The study is restricted to third-year students at Van Lang University's Faculty of Foreign Languages for the following purposes. Juniors must first have a certain level of English and have taken at least four semesters of English as a major. As a result, these students are expected to achieve certain skills and knowledge in listening comprehension courses.

Furthermore, unlike what they learned in high school, they are exposed to listening skills as a separate subject at university. More specifically, a completely new approach to learning English is offered. Students spent a significant portion of their time in high school focusing on grammar while neglecting other skills. Their English experiences are similar since they are all from rural areas and were affected by an English education curriculum for high school understudies, which did not provide students with opportunities to practice their English listening skills. As a consequence, it will be a major barrier to the modern learning strategy. They've also had the chance to practice listening skills by working on tests and tasks from previous semesters.

Table 3. 1: Demographic information of the sample (N = 135)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
1. Gender		
Female	95	70.4%
Male	31	23%
Prefer not to say	9	6.7%
2. Internet skills level		
Excellent	6	4.4%
Good	24	17.8%
Moderate	105	77.8%

3.2 Design of the Study

The present study focuses on finding out the difficulties in the process of listening comprehension experienced by Van Lang University students. In order to obtain the information associated with the research problem, the research follows a mixed research design. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected by questionnaires online. The quantitative research method will be used so as to meet the purposes of the study. The questionnaires were designed because the researchers find it easy to summarize and analyze the collected data. The study's data collection aims to learn about students' attitudes toward using Microsoft Teams to study English listening comprehension skills among those whose major is the English language.

Moreover, before conducting the questionnaire and interview, the researchers affirmed that their responses would only be used to support the study and that their personal information (name, age, gender, etc.) would be kept confidential. All of the participants were volunteers and willing to answer the whole question. They knew precisely the purpose of the research and understood that the entire interview would be recorded.

3.2.1. Questionnaires for surveys

The questionnaires were chosen as a data collection tool for the analysis, as discussed in the previous section. When making such a decision, the researchers carefully evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of such instruments. Because of the ease in which they can be constructed, their extreme simplicity, and their ability to collect a large amount of data rapidly, the researchers chose to use questionnaires in this study. Besides, with the assistance of computer tools, the time and cost of data processing could be reduced. According to Wright (2005), one of the advantages of using a questionnaire survey is the flexibility of providing automated data collection, which saves time and effort for researchers. As a result, from the researchers' perspective, this tool is the most appropriate data collection process.

3.2.2. Semi-structured interview

As noted previously, the researchers overcame the limitations of using questionnaires through the interview method. In order to be more specific, the researchers use a semi-structured

interview in this paper. According to Fox (2009), the open-ended nature of the question determines the subject under discussion in semi-structured interviewing, but it also allows the interviewer and interviewee to consider some matters on a deeper level. This approach is effective for gathering comprehensive information about personal feelings, attitudes, and opinions. It is useful to attain perspective, knowledge, and mindset by allowing learners to report in their own words.

3.3 Data collection & analysis

A self-reporting questionnaire was created to gather information about the participants' listening challenges as well as their attitudes toward E-learning/ MS Teams. This study's questionnaire included 33 items. The researchers can interpret the results more easily and quickly with this form of closed-ended questions. The questionnaire followed the five-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” (1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree) and was divided into two separate sections. The first section, comprised of 21 questions, aimed to identify participants' common challenges in using Microsoft Teams to study English listening comprehension skills. The purpose of the second section, which included 12 questions, was to determine how the participants felt about learning with Microsoft Teams.

The participants were given a 5-point Likert scale to answer on, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Four items about digital literacy issues for students were included in the first part. The second section included four items related to cognitive overload problems faced by students. Three comments about the listener factors challenge for students made up the third section. In the fourth part, two statements showed technology challenges for students, while the fifth part, with six items, revealed English ability challenges for students. Three tasks and activities challenges for students were included in the sixth part.

The data was examined using advanced calculation techniques such as mean (M) and standard deviation (Std. Deviation). The evaluation was graded on a three-bank scale for convenience of discussion: low (1.0–2.5), medium (2.6–3.4), and high (3.5–5.0).

In this study, every interview lasted about ten minutes and was audio-taped or video-recorded. Moreover, three third-year students were interviewed for the research. The reason for choosing them is although they are taking the same course (Listening 4), the level of listening comprehension skill they have achieved is different. Besides, two out of three students come from other provinces to the city to attend university while the other has lived in the city since childhood. Educational conditions and opportunities for exposure to technology are better in cities and are quite limited in rural areas or some small provinces.

A semi-structured interview question list is aimed to convey information about participants' attitudes toward using the E-learning method/MS Teams. The interview consists of six question items designed to investigate third-year students' perceptions of using the E-learning method via MS Teams.

To ensure that the collected data was reliable, it was thoroughly reviewed, and any inaccurate or incomplete submissions were removed. The researchers left out 15 incomplete or inaccurate questionnaires after collecting and distributing 135. Following that, the primary data is organized into categories based on the research questions. For the statistical analysis of the research questions, data relating to descriptive statistics (means, modes, standard deviations, and so on) are computed. Finally, the researchers design tables to illustrate the relationships for comparison purposes.

Reliability statistics (Cronbach's Alpha)

Table 3. 2: The reliability of the questionnaire

Name of variable	Value of Cronbach's Alpha	Number of questions
Internet and software challenges for students	0.816	4
Cognitive overload challenges for students	0.741	2
Listener factors challenge for students	0.790	3
Technology challenges for students	0.739	3
English ability challenges for students	0.807	4
Tasks and activities challenge for students	0.803	3
Learning environment challenges for students	0.779	2
English – majored students' attitudes towards E-learning/ MS Teams	0.632	12

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 22 program was used to analyze the data obtained in this analysis. Cronbach's Alpha Model, a model of internal consistency, based on the average inter-item correlation, was used to determine the questionnaire's reliability in the study. The instrument's values are within the acceptable range of reliability (Pallant, 2002), indicating that it is very accurate for data collection. Thus, the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire used in this research ranged from 0.632 to 0.816, suggesting that the data collection instrument has a high-reliability coefficient.

4. Results/Findings and discussion

The results will be given in the order in which the questionnaires were completed in response to the first research question: **"What are the difficulties in studying the listening comprehension skill through Microsoft Teams of major English students at Van Lang University?"**. As mentioned above, the analysis comprises descriptive statistics such as mean, minimum, maximum, standard deviation (SD).

4.1. Internet and software challenges for students

Table 4. 1: The participants' perspectives on the internet and software issues

Item	Content	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	The nature of the sound I listen to is influenced by the speed of my internet connection.	4.10	0.854
2	When listening to the lecture, I frequently become disconnected	4.13	0.777
3	Since the software did not show details about the class that began, I missed a portion of the session	4.24	0.810
4	The speed of the audio is affected by my internet connection	4.16	0.686

Table 4. 2: Score analysis of participants' overall perspectives on the internet and software issues

Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
2.25	5.00	4.16	0.629

Four items illustrate students' perceptions of various aspects of the internet and software issues related to listening problems. All of these four mean ratings, as shown in Table 4.1, were mostly in (4.10 - 4.24). This high range of evaluations means that these items had a significant impact on the participants' listening processes, especially when it comes to learning listening comprehension. Item 1 and 4 indicate that the pace of the internet connection had a major impact on the nature of the sound students heard ($M = 4.10$) and the audio's speed ($M = 4.16$). In addition, when listening to the lecture, participants often become disconnected ($M = 4.13$). Furthermore, the program fails to display information about the class that had started, causing them to miss a portion of the lesson ($M = 4.24$). It can be seen that the majority of the participants report that the internet connection is a significant issue that makes learning listening comprehension via Microsoft Teams difficult for them. However, this challenge cannot be avoided because internet access can become faulty or fail at any time (Ribeiro, 2020). Therefore, it is important to have a backup option in case this happens. The app, Microsoft Teams, in this case, also has some drawbacks in terms of notification, which may cause students to miss important classroom announcements or the classroom itself. In general, these items have low standard deviations ranging from 0.686 to 0.854. Obviously, the students face similar difficulties.

4.2. Cognitive overload challenges for students

Table 4. 3: The participants' perspectives on the cognitive overload issues

Item	Content	Mean	Std. Deviation
5	I lose my concentration when the text is too long	4.30	0.751
6	I feel overwhelmed when I have to listen to too much information	4.31	0.719

Table 4. 4: Score analysis of participants' overall perspectives on cognitive overload issues

Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
2.00	5.00	4.30	0.656

The students are asked to rate the level of psychological difficulties in items five and six. As seen in the table, the participants found it difficult to focus when the text was too long ($M = 4.30$). This result is due to the fact that the vast majority of them have never learned academic listening courses. In addition, these audio enable the listeners to not only have a basic understanding of the subject matter but also to master certain skills while listening. Furthermore, item number six in this table also reveals that when the participants have to hear and absorb a variety of knowledge in a certain amount of time, most of them feel exhausted ($M = 4.31$). Understandably, that the students rarely listen to the dense information recorded text. From these two points, we can see that the students have trouble learning listening comprehension because most of them are unable to focus for long periods and are overwhelmed by knowledge.

4.3. Listener factors challenge for students

Table 4. 5: The participants' perspectives on listener factors challenge

Item	Content	Mean	Std. Deviation
7	I have trouble figuring out what the instructor is trying to mean when he or she corrects the text	4.26	0.825
8	I lack the ability to actively listen when learning listening comprehension via Microsoft Teams	4.22	0.814
9	I feel nervous in completing the listening tasks in the given time	4.28	0.799

Table 4. 6: Score analysis of participants' overall perspectives on listener factors issues

Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
2.33	5.00	3.89	0.648

Table 4.5 above shown the listener factors challenges for the students. According to the mean (4.26), the survey results show that when the teacher corrected the text, they cannot figure out what he or she means to explain. The reason for this can be explained by the fact that when the teacher corrects the lesson, the students are unable to understand exactly what the teacher is referring to, whether it was plural or singular, and so on. They also lack the ability to actively listen by using Microsoft Teams to practice listening comprehension (M = 4.22). According to Barnard (2017) and Nguyen et al. (2021), the ability to concentrate completely on a speaker, understand their message and comprehend the details is known as active listening. Unlike passive listening, which is the act of hearing a speaker but failing to recall what they said, active listening highly valued the ability to recall particulars without having to repeat information. Regrettably, a large number of these students lack this skill, making it more difficult for them to learn listening comprehension. Additionally, item nine reveals that the students are anxious about finishing the listening tasks in the time allocated (M = 4.28). As mentioned in the previous section, the participants have less experience learning listening comprehension. This has a significant impact on how easily they feel pressed to complete a test.

4.4. Technology challenges for students

Table 4. 7: The participants' perspectives on technology challenges

Item	Content	Mean	Std. Deviation
10	I find it difficult to understand English when there unclear sound resulting from a poor quality CD player	4.38	0.723
11	My device's sound quality is low, impacting the quality of my listening	4.33	0.748
12	The course notes and documents are quite often corrupted when they are uploaded to Microsoft Teams, making it difficult for me to access and download them.	4.23	0.847

Table 4. 8: Score analysis of participants' overall perspectives on technology challenges

Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
2.00	5.00	4.31	0.628

The data in this table indicates that the students have trouble with technology on a regular basis. The students' listening process is affected by unclear sounds caused by low-quality equipment, such as a CD player. For example, the text is recorded in a noisy environment, or the tape has been used for such a long time that the quality had declined. What is worth mentioning here is that low-quality equipment has the highest mean of 4.38, but the lowest standard deviation of 0.723. This means that the students share the same point of view on the issue. Similarly, the sound quality on the participants' devices is poor, affecting the quality of

their listening ($M = 4.33$). Item 12 uncovers that the students also find it difficult to access and download materials for studying when learning online through MS Teams ($M = 4.23$). This can be because the document is corrupted just before being uploaded, the file is no longer available, or the student accidentally deleted the file.

4.5. English ability challenges for students

Table 4. 9: The participants' perspectives on English ability challenges

Item	Content	Mean	Std. Deviation
13	English materials used on the online lesson of listening comprehension enhance my understanding	4.13	0.777
14	Without the direct teacher's guidance as in the classroom, I find it difficult to comprehend the meaning of the spoken text	4.25	0.689
15	Teachers cannot see my reactions as clearly as in a face-to-face classroom to see if I can understand listening texts	4.20	0.705
16	When learning listening comprehension through Microsoft Teams, I find it difficult to express what I want to say if I do not understand the lesson	4.18	0.729

Table 4. 10: Score analysis of participants' overall perspectives on English ability challenges

Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
2.25	5.00	4.19	0.578

The table 4 summarizes statistics for each item highlight potential issues with English ability from the learners themselves. In item 13 ($M = 4.13$), the participants state that the English materials used in the online listening comprehension lesson were beyond their comprehension. It can be easy to understand because the listening materials used often are in academic language. Thus, the students do not catch them regularly. Moreover, item 14 receives the highest means (4.25) with a fairly low standard deviation of 0.689. As state by the participants, it is difficult to understand the meaning of the spoken text without direct teacher guidance in a classroom setting. For example, the students may not have enough vocabulary or background knowledge when listening to an unfamiliar subject, and they may experience psychological issues, which may lead to poor listening performance. Besides, the students have the most in common when it comes to the impact of teacher teaching on learning to listen. The drawbacks of E-learning are evident in items 15 ($M = 4.20$) and 16 ($M = 4.18$). The majority of the students agree that teachers cannot see their expressions as clearly as they do in a face-to-face classroom to determine whether or not they understand listening texts. Additionally, if the participants do not understand the lesson while learning

listening comprehension through Microsoft Teams, it is difficult for them to express themselves. In conclusion, broken microphones, teachers unable to answer all or slowly answering questions to the students, the students afraid to ask questions that the majority of the class understands, which they can do individually after the lesson if they study directly at school are all potential explanations.

4.6. Tasks and activities challenge for students

Table 4. 11: The participants' perspectives on tasks and activities challenge

Item	Content	Mean	Std. Deviation
17	I have difficulty in completing the listening tasks in online courses	4.16	0.686
18	I find it difficult to do listening activities in group work via Microsoft Teams	4.23	0.716
19	Differences in skill/ knowledge level of group members interfere with my listening activities	4.21	0.744

Table 4. 12: Score analysis of participants' overall perspectives on tasks and activities challenge

Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
2.33	5.00	4.20	0.606

Three items in the table reveal that the majority of these students have the following issues: difficulty completing listening tasks in online classes (M = 4.16), difficulty conducting listening activities in group work through Microsoft Teams (M = 4.23). Firstly, numerous factors contribute to the students experiencing challenges during online course exercises. For instance, the sound in the audio is too small or includes too much noise, the speaker's speed is too fast, too many new words or the intonation is unfamiliar, and so on. Secondly, the participants find it difficult to conduct listening activities while working in groups via Microsoft Teams. Perhaps because the presence of members is insufficient, or some members are not serious about team activities, resulting in poor group results. Besides that, group members' differing skill/knowledge levels also obstruct their listening practices (M = 4.21).

4.7. Learning environment challenges for students

Table 4. 13: The participants' perspectives on learning environment problem

Item	Content	Mean	Std. Deviation
20	It is difficult for me to concentrate on the lesson because of the noise around	4.30	0.669
21	I have too many distractions, such as games, YouTube, and so on	4.15	0.682

Table 4. 14: Score analysis of participants' overall perspectives on learning environment problems

Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
2.50	5.00	4.23	0.611

The sounds around the students also make it difficult for them to concentrate ($M = 4.30$), according to item 23 in this table. The participants also comment that they have so many distractions when studying, such as games, YouTube, etc. ($M = 4.15$). Both of these items have a high mean but a low standard deviation of 0.669 and 0.682, respectively. From these statistics, it is predicted that the majority of survey respondents are experiencing these difficulties. It can be concluded that studying online at home makes it difficult for the students to focus due to distractions such as television, computer, and outside noise. Since this is a new learning experience for them, it will take some time for them to adjust.

Overall, according to tables 4.2, 4.4, 4.6, 4.8, 4.10, 4.12, and 4.14, among the others, cognitive overload and technology have the highest mean (4.3 and 4.31). In other words, these two factors are the two barriers that most students suffer when using MS Teams to study listening comprehension.

The second question: **“What attitudes do English majors at Van Lang University have toward E-learning/ Microsoft Teams?”** seeks to learn more about the attitudes of English majors at Van Lang University toward E-learning, specifically Microsoft Teams. To add to the data, the interviews were conducted with three volunteers (S1, S2, and S3). The researchers will analyze the data collected from survey questionnaires and interviews, as discussed in the Methodology section, to obtain detailed data. Based on the information gathered from the survey questionnaire, these interviews were semi-structured. In comparison to the questionnaire, the interviewees were granted more freedom to express themselves thoroughly and confidently during the interview. These conversations were also recorded for data collection purposes. The following is a summary of the questions, as well as some main remarks and quotes.

Table 4. 15: The participants' perspectives toward E-learning/ Microsoft Teams

Item	Content	Mean	Std. Deviation
22	When using the E-learning method via Microsoft Teams., there is a lack of interaction between teachers and students as well as among students	4.33	0.637
23	Microsoft Teams is too complicated to use	1.96	0.834
24	Microsoft Teams is not easy use through cellphone	4.33	0.678
25	When using the E-learning method via Microsoft Teams, there is a lack of feedback from peers	4.27	0.661
26	Low or no participation of other group members during the learning process via Microsoft Teams	4.23	0.845
27	Slow internet connectivity is a major problem I face when using the E-learning method via Microsoft Teams.	4.35	0.718
28	When I study via Microsoft Teams, I encounter physical health issues such as eye strain and tinnitus	4.23	0.716
29	I find it hard to create motivation when learning via Microsoft Teams	4.35	0.785
30	I prefer to learn online to face to face	2.74	1.470
31	I feel comfortable in answering questions in an online class	3.37	1.257
32	An online course provides less flexibility than a face-to-face course	2.07	1.094
33	Because of the comfortable learning environment, I recommend conducting online learning in the future	1.85	1.090

Table 4. 16: Score analysis of participants' overall perspectives toward E-learning/ Microsoft Teams

Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
2.25	4.67	3.5	0.416

According to the findings of the interview, all three interviewees learned more than six subjects using E-learning. This influences their judgment because they have attended a certain number of classes rather than just one. In other words, their responses can be reliable.

What are your thoughts on using the E-learning method through Microsoft Teams?

As shown in the above table, the students have the perception of disagreeing if their interaction in online learning supports them in their studies. This is demonstrated by several factors, including their responses to a questionnaire, which reveal that they have difficulty communicating with both their fellow students and lecturers. McConnell (2006) discussed issues related to interpersonal aspects of online communication, such as students feeling lonely, neglected by other participants, or hesitant to express their thoughts. When asked about her thoughts on online learning, S1 assumes that students and teachers do not interact much while studying online. Therefore, the classroom becomes less connected and uninteresting. This helps to explain why item number 22 has such a high mean of 4.33.

In addition, S1 responds that she believes Microsoft Teams is more modern and convenient than other apps at the moment. She is free to choose wherever and whenever she wants to learn. Sharing the same idea with S1, S3 says that learning through Microsoft Teams is "quite convenient and flexible". This is compatible with the conclusions of item 32 of the questionnaire, which has a low mean of 2.07. Admittedly, the students state that online courses have great potential. However, S2 does not agree that the E-learning method was appropriate for her. She shares that "learning via Microsoft Teams is inconvenient for me, despite how easy it is to use. I still prefer face-to-face learning. "This is why, in table 4.15, item 30 has a high standard deviation (1.470), implying that there is a significant variation in the responses provided by the respondents.

Furthermore, data collected show that most participants disagree with item 23 (Microsoft Teams is too complicated to use), with a notable mean of 1.96 and a low standard deviation of 0.834. Not surprisingly, three of S1, S2, and S3 say the Microsoft Teams software is not difficult to use, even though S3 reports that she "was a little confused at first about how to use this app because it was new".

Could you describe any advantages of learning through Microsoft Teams that you have experienced?

Regarding the advantages of online learning, it is stated that the students feel comfortable responding to questions in an online class, with a fairly high mean of 3.37 for item 31. When asked about the same topic, S1 admits she feels "more comfortable studying online" because she does not have to worry about her "classmates judging" her when she has to answer the teacher's questions. S3 shares the same viewpoint when she says, "because I am an introvert, learning online through Microsoft Teams helped me avoid being shy when answering questions." S2 remarks: "When I studied online, I felt very comfortable because I could study at home."

Could you describe any challenges of learning through Microsoft Teams that you have experienced?

In terms of challenges, "one issue I have had with Microsoft Teams is that the instructor had called a meeting to start the class, but I did not receive the call", S1 replies. She also comments that "the internet connection in my location was so poor that I was unable to access the class meeting". This is also the problem that S2 has to deal with when using Microsoft Teams. She complains that her internet "disconnected from time to time", and she is "thrown out" of the classroom. Based on the opinions of these interviewees and a high mean of 4.35 for item 27, it is clear that internet connection is a major issue for the students when using the E-learning method. Also, S2 concludes, "when I had to do teamwork, the lack of cooperation of other members of the group during the classroom activities through Microsoft Teams was a major challenge for me". This implies that the outcome of item 26 with a mean of 4.23 could be reliable. Motivation (item 29) is another barrier that S3 perceives, with a large mean of 4.35 and a small standard deviation of 0.785. These statistics indicate these students faced the same challenge. S3 mentions she is easily "distracted and lazy" "because there is no direct supervision by teachers". This is also why S2 finds "it difficult to concentrate on the lesson". Moreover, S2 says that "I tried to learn on my phone, but I had trouble opening some of the instructor's lecture files." This fact is realistic with the findings of item 24 that has a mean of 4.33.

Besides, the participants have trouble in terms of physical health, such as eye strain or tinnitus ($M = 4.23$). With a standard deviation of 0.716, the respondents have quite consistent answers. Concerning the same subject, it should be noted that 49.76% of parents assumed that their children's eyesight had deteriorated as a result of the online classes (Mohan et al., 2021). Additionally, as S2 describes in the interview, peer feedback is absent because of the lack of communication among group members when taking an online course through MS Teams. Based on the mean of 4.27 (item 25), this factor has a major effect on these students' attitudes toward online learning.

Do you enjoy taking online courses?

Most of the students disagreed on whether they would consider pursuing online learning in the future due to the conventional learning atmosphere, according to item 33 ($M = 1.85$). Remarkably, this item has an extraordinary standard deviation of 1.09. The disparity in the interpretation of the three interviewees provided evidence for this finding. S2 does not "prefer taking this sort of course", S3 replies yes, and S1 says that "I'm not sure if I like it or not." The explanation for this is that the participants have previous experience with online learning, which provides them with both opportunities and disadvantages. After all, the majority of these students come to the conclusion that online learning confronted them with more challenges than benefits.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary of Major Findings

The information gathered from the survey questionnaire, and semi-structured interview was analyzed to conclude in order to answer the two research questions asked at the outset of the analysis. Below is a summary of the main findings:

5.1.1. The difficulties encountered by English-major students at Van Lang University while studying listening comprehension skills via Microsoft Teams:

First, as the Covid-19 pandemic breaks out, E-learning teaching approaches are used, and VLU's use of teaching and learning is MS Teams. In terms of internet and software challenges, since the students have to study online using Microsoft Teams software, the researchers discover that the program's failure to display information about the class that had begun has such a significant impact on the students. Also, the stability of the internet connection is indeed a key factor influencing the students' listening processes. Furthermore, in such a situation, most of these students have difficulty absorbing a large amount of information in such a short period. When it comes to correct the listening text, they often have trouble figuring out what the teacher was trying to clarify or mention because the teacher often says the answer key rather than writing it down. More noticeably, the students confess to lacking the ability to actively listen while using the E-learning platform, which is an essential skill for studying listening comprehension. In addition, one of the most stressful challenges that the students face with technology is that their listening process is compromised by unclear sounds caused by low-quality devices. With regards to English ability, these students have a consistent perception that the English materials used in the online listening comprehension lesson are beyond their comprehension without the direct teacher's guidance that they would obtain in the classroom due to their limited vocabulary and lack of context knowledge. Besides, when working in a team through Microsoft Teams, the researcher realizes that the participants struggle to fulfill listening activities. Lastly, it is difficult for the students to focus due to the noises around them and many distractions they face while learning, such as games, YouTube, and so on. These two are also the most major obstacles for these listeners when using the online learning method.

5.1.2. Van Lang University English majors' perspectives on E-learning and Microsoft Teams:

First of all, according to the data gathered, the majority of participants state that the Microsoft Teams software is a very useful, simple, and adaptable tool to use. Moreover, in an online class, these students feel comfortable responding to questions because they do not have to be afraid of their peers' judging. However, based on the results and discussion, it is clear that students in an online learning environment face numerous challenges. Regrettably, it is clear from the results and discussion that the students in an online learning environment face numerous barriers, including the app does not notify that class has begun, no direct supervision by teachers, lack of peer contribution due to a lack of interaction among group members, and physical health. As a result of their own experience with these issues, they are

hesitant and unwilling to take online courses in the future.

5.2. Implications

5.2.1. Pedagogical implications for the teachers

First and foremost, we need to accept that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on all aspects of life, including the education sector, which has been forced into a difficult situation in Vietnam due to the country's main focus on face-to-face education. On the other hand, the curriculum and learning requirements cannot be postponed. To satisfy this need, the E-learning approach has been implemented. After a period of using this teaching and learning technique at VLU, it is obviously seen that E-learning is a reasonable alternative to face-to-face learning in terms of both time and place. However, from the issues discussed, it can be seen that Van Lang EFL students are aware of the issues but struggle to find a way to overcome them. This is the responsibility of not only the lecturers but also the board of directors must quickly find ways to assist students and innovate teaching methods through MS Teams as well as for English listening comprehension. These individuals also contribute a major role in encouraging and motivating students to adapt to this learning method (E-learning method).

In addition, teachers, in particular, are those who choose the topics and activities in the classroom; as a result, they could provide students with supplemental exercises to practice from other sources. Besides that, they may be able to recommend some helpful websites for improving listening comprehension.

Furthermore, since the opportunity to observe is limited in online learning, pre-teaching vocabulary, guiding students to highlight main ideas and guessing the meanings of new words should be considered to add to the curriculum of listening comprehension at VLU. These may help the students familiarize themselves with the subject and develop confidence when listening to the task.

Finally, teachers in the university can develop more small activities that are both fun and educational in order to accelerate students' motivation. For example, using games to review vocabulary and background knowledge of the listening topic but still keep it lighthearted. There are many explanations why games should be included in language classes. According to Sigurðardóttir (2010), games are entertaining, which is important because they can help refresh students who have always been inactive due to a lack of motivation. It is essential to keep the students engaged because teachers will never be able to teach them anything unless they are willing to participate in the learning process.

Besides, the researchers truly surprise with the result that most of the EFL students in VLU oppose and are unwilling to continue with online classes. To reduce the students' difficulties with the E-learning method, the board of directors should have some policies to support students so that they can access online learning devices (computers, smartphones, etc.)

5.2.2. Pedagogical implications for the students

From the result of the study, Van Lang EFL students face many obstacles in using the E-learning method through MS Teams software. Remarkably, these students acknowledge precisely the difficulties they have to confront. In order to achieve a good performance in online listening comprehension classes, Van Lang EFL students are suggested to have a high level of autonomy in encountering this ability. These students are recommended to make a home practice plan for listening. Moreover, the researchers believe that through the findings of this research, participating in more class activities and teamwork will help EFL students at the university improve their listening ability when learning in an online environment.

5.3. Limitations

5.3.1. Limitations of the study

Despite the researchers' efforts, this paper still has some drawbacks. First, the interview's sample size is limited to 135 students enrolled in the "24" course at VLU's Foreign Languages Faculty, with 120 valid responses. As a consequence, the findings cannot be applied to the whole population. The lack of previous project work is the next constraint. It is necessary for the researchers to have several previous pieces of research to analyze in order to provide a solid foundation for the paper; however, there are a few on the subject itself. Besides, due to time constraints, the researchers cannot be able to cover and collect all of the necessary data to further investigate the concerns raised in this study. In summary, the study contains three weaknesses that are a limited number of participants, a lack of previous research, time constraints.

5.3.2. Suggestions for further research

In future research, the researchers suggest that interviewing students could broaden the student sample to include a wider range of majors and grade levels. Additionally, in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the listening obstacles, the study could be performed by reviewing some online listening comprehension courses and interviewing some teachers. The researchers also expect that future papers could focus on observing students' attitudes as well as the impact of the online learning environment on taking online classes through Microsoft Teams.

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Biodata

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An Investigation into Non-English Major Students' Problems in Taking Aptis Listening and Reading

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: non-English major students, problems, Aptis listening, Aptis reading.

In order to standardize non-English major students' English skills, Hoa Sen University develops English-language graduation criteria at the B1 level on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The university adopted Aptis as a standardized examination since it was created by British Council specialists in language testing and is based on the most recent assessment research. Therefore, the students have a continual struggle to obtain suitable Aptis test scores. Within the boundaries of the study paper, the objective of the piece was to identify the challenges that students commonly experience when doing two Aptis components: listening and reading. The participants are 67 non-English major students enrolling in Aptis preparation courses for the summer semester of 2021. After the pre-test, the first online questionnaire was sent out, and the second was delivered immediately following the post-test. After that, the data's average value, percentage, and standard deviation were calculated. Despite the fact that the Aptis pre-test caused substantial problems in every category, there were substantial changes in students' views after the post-test. Furthermore, students believed that the classes assisted them in improving their vocabulary, grammar, and confidence.

Introduction

According to research conducted by the British Council (2014), the English language education industry has increasingly focused on the role of English in boosting student employment performance, particularly in Asian nations where English for professional development is more examined (Erling & Seargeant, 2013). In response to the growing need for English skills, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) undertook a series of top-down and bottom-up reforms, including the National Foreign Languages Project (NFLP) 2020, with the objective of putting English to the advantage of Vietnamese graduates (Bui & Nguyen, 2016). As a part of

NFLP 2020, significant efforts have been made to fundamentally reform language assessment and testing methods, including the establishment of the national foreign language proficiency framework, the Vietnam Foreign Language Framework (VFLF), which is compatible with the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) (Nguyen et al., 2018). To be conferred a bachelor's degree, non-English majors must obtain level 3 of the VFLF, which is comparable to a B1 CEFR level (Phuong, 2017). Under this program, students can choose from a range of English proficiency examinations established by national or international testing organizations (Le, 2017). While most exams were paper-based assessments a few years ago, the trend toward computer-based tests is growing by the day (Chapelle & Voss, 2016). Although the British Council first introduced Aptis in Vietnam in 2013, it is widely regarded as the revolutionary new English language testing and assessment tool because it provides an innovative new tool to help organizations reach more people, connect with them, and raise English language standards (British Council, 2018). As a result, several institutions and colleges around the nation, notably Hoa Sen University, have begun utilizing Aptis to measure students' output English skills. In order to support students in taking Aptis, some preparation courses have been conducted. However, the question of whether these preparation courses are sufficient for students is not properly investigated. Hence, the purpose of this page is neither to describe the differences between a computer-based exam and a paper-based exam nor to list all four skills used by the Aptis test to assess English proficiency. In other words, the current study aimed at identifying student difficulties in taking Aptis listening and speaking tests. Also, the effectiveness of the preparation course would be considered from students' perspectives.

Literature review

Problems of Listening comprehension skills

Several research studies focused on the various issues and obstacles that language learners encounter listening comprehension. Underwood (1989) addressed listeners' experience in understanding what they heard more than three decades ago. As a result, the following are some potential roadblocks: (1) Listeners cannot always repeat words throughout the listening task, (2) the listener lacks vocabulary, (3) the listener may not understand the signs that the speaker is going from one concept to another, and (5) the listener may lack knowledge base.

According to Goh (2000), listening comprehension challenges are difficulties that listeners experience during the three phases of perception, parsing, and utilization. Listeners' failure to detect intonation, stress and varied accents in a speech stream is the first cause of perception difficulties (Anderson, 1995). Listeners are confronted with numerous primary obstacles at this phase: phonological and lexical issues. In addition, learners' listening comprehension may be harmed by rapid speech speeds and unfamiliar terminology. Moreover, in addition to parsing issues, listening comprehension processing can also have syntactic and semantic issues. Listeners may not be able to construct a mental representation from the words heard since they forget what they've heard quickly. Finally, utilization addresses the issues that EFL/ESL

students frequently confront when it comes to discourse. Listeners, for example, may struggle to recognize the overall structure of ideas in a text. In a research conducted by Nguyen (2021) on listening skills training using Google Classroom, the students reported that they considered Google Classroom to be helpful and convenient. However, the lack of Internet connectivity and the device's limited capability in enabling contact between students and teachers prompted two concerns.

Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) discovered that unexpected listening themes might also impede students' listening comprehension while investigating listening comprehension in TOEIC exams. Furthermore, the issue might be caused by the listeners' capacity and the audio quality (Anandapong, 2011). Chonprakai (2009) claims that due to the rapid speed of the recordings, test-takers cannot recognize the main concept; even native speakers' normal speaking speed is too fast for them to comprehend. Another study by Khamprated (2012) found that the issues are still in the regional accent, which has an impact on the answers.

Problems of Reading comprehension skills

Aside from listening comprehension, a wide range of research has been conducted on the concerns students have with reading comprehension. Tokunaga (2008) discovered that participants were unable to comprehend the meaning, grasp, and identify the main concept of the passage owing to a lack of vocabulary when studying test takers' issues with the reading comprehension component of the English test. He went on to explain that most test-takers obtain poor scores as they lack the essential test-taking techniques and strategies.

Furthermore, according to Cohen (200), test takers lacked reading comprehension abilities and could not comprehend the reading exam's material. Garcia, Ramayan, Sepe, and Silor (2014) discovered that test participants forgot the vocabulary they had acquired while assessing their reading tasks. Many additional research studies (Hall, 2012; Zuhra, 2015; Tartila et al., 2013) found that a lack of vocabulary has a significant impact on reading ability, in which grammatical knowledge is one of the major elements. Students have difficulties with long and complicated texts containing a variety of review phrases, according to Zuhra (2015). When it comes to reading comprehension, especially when taking a test, students struggle to construct good sentences that are cohesive and consistent with the text. As per Atikah (2009), if students have a sufficient vocabulary and strong grammatical comprehension, the length of the text would not be an issue, and they will be able to quickly grasp and answer the question. The research of Bui (2021) showed that in order for learners to successfully read information from the Internet, it is necessary for them to first establish their reading goals. Learners themselves should be self-sufficient and possess strong independent learning abilities. Furthermore, because of the large quantity of diverse material available on the Internet, learners are required to grasp accurate websites and succinct information. Tokunaga (2008) discovered that the participants were unable to comprehend the contents of the reading texts and grasp and identify the major concepts included within them.

Furthermore, the exam takers have a restricted understanding of language. Furthermore, Cohen (2006) points out that the test takers do not have enough reading comprehension abilities and do not comprehend the topic of the reading exam in question. Tokunaga (2008) believes that many test-takers get poor results because they lack sufficient understanding of the exam's methods and tactics. The provision of TOEIC preparatory training for test-takers, according to Sewell (2005), maybe one of the answers to the issues highlighted. Previous research has mostly focused on two main factors that lead students to fail reading comprehension tests: a lack of vocabulary and an inadequate grammatical basis.

Because there has been relatively little research on Aptis, particularly on Aptis reading and listening, some prior studies on difficulties experienced by test-takers on the TOEIC exam were utilized as the basis for this study's literature review. Furthermore, the discussion of difficulties that learners experience in their listening and reading comprehension skills is presented with the goal of clarifying the issues that students confront in their learning.

Aptis is a Standard English Language Proficiency Test

The British Council developed Aptis to provide institutions with English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) assessment services for a variety of requirements, according to Zheng and Berry (2015). The test values are represented as a scale of scores (0-50) or a level of difficulty (CEFR). Grammar and vocabulary, reading, listening, writing, and speaking are the five components of the Aptis test. As a contestant, one must prepare for fundamental grammar and vocabulary, which are both essential (Aptis Candidate Guide, 2018). Many Aptis activities are available on the internet to help individuals learn what they need to accomplish. The following two components are particularly discussed in this article.

In terms of the reading component, there is a total of 35 minutes allocated for this section, which is divided into four parts. The first part is sentence comprehension, in which the candidates complete the sentences by selecting one right answer from a three-choice multiple-choice question. The second part of the test is text cohesion, in which students must arrange sentences in the correct sequence to create a story out of seven jumbled sentences. Part three focuses on comprehending brief texts, in which candidates build sentences by selecting the most appropriate word from a list. The fourth element is a lengthy text comprehension task in which the test takers must match headings to paragraphs. There are seven paragraphs and eight headings as a whole (Aptis Candidate Guide, 2018).

Previous studies on students' perceptions towards problems with Aptis

Test-takers' views of Aptis, according to Jin & Cheng (2013), may have influenced their performance. Their responses tended to concur that the speaking test was tough, but they disagreed about the difficulty of the other four activities. This disparity raises the question of how closely test takers' perceptions of task difficulty correspond to the real difficulty of individual problems and the entire exam. Brown's (1993) research participants mentioned a number of variables that contributed to the difficulty of these exams, including the test length. Unfamiliar terminology, the speed of voices on the tape, the lack of voices on the tape,

confusing prompts, too much input data to assimilate, and lack of familiarity with the task type are all factors that attributed to the test results not being as predicted, as per this study. When compared to other international examinations, participants rate Aptis lower than IELTS, TOEFL, and GRE. While the Aptis test has some similarities to other tests, it also has notable differences. All exams appear to be designed to fully evaluate listening, speaking, reading, writing, and other English abilities, according to test takers. Aptis may represent the participants' linguistic ability, they realized. The Aptis exam is seen to be more closely connected to ordinary life and communication, as indicated in the questionnaires and interviews, which is congruent with Aptis' original objective. Aptis, as previously said, strives to deliver a flexible, cheap, and trustworthy English language evaluation for practical applications such as recruiting and career development (O'Sullivan, 2012).

Previous research only looked at test-takers views of the overall difficulties they had when taking the Aptis exam in its entirety. However, no study has been done on the issues that students' issues when taking Aptis listening and reading examinations, particularly the changes that students undergo after taking an Aptis preparation course. As a result, research of these underappreciated concerns is required.

Effectiveness of preparation courses for English language tests

Because there has been almost no previous research on this issue in relation to Aptis, it is necessary to cite papers related to preparation courses for other standardized tests. The majority of research on the impact of test preparation on language exams has concentrated on two main testing systems, TOEFL and IELTS. A study conducted by Ward and Xu (1994) looked at the impact of summarizing skills training on TOEFL results. A 6-week training program on summarizing abilities using written materials resulted in a 5 standard deviation score increase on the TOEFL for participants. Nguyen (2007) examined the impact of a preparatory course on the TOEFL iBT Listening and IELTS Listening exams. Nguyen found that test preparation had an impact on the IELTS and TOEFL iBT scores. Hayes and Read (2004) found a strong positive connection between test preparation and IELTS Listening test results in another research.

Research Questions

This research seeks to investigate the students' issues in taking Aptis listening and reading in light of the current situation and the gap in the literature described above. As a result, the research question is as follows:

What are Hoa Sen University students' experiences and perceptions of Aptis listening and reading issues before and after the Aptis preparation course?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

During the summer semester of the academic year 2021, 80 students registered in three Aptis preparation courses at Hoa Sen University in Ho Chi Minh City. The study included 67 non-English major students who completed the pre-test and post-test questionnaires.

In this research, the convenience sampling approach was used (also known as Haphazard Sampling or Accidental Sampling). Convenience sampling is a kind of non-probability or non-random sampling in which members of the target population are included in the study if they meet certain practical criteria, such as accessibility, geographic closeness, availability at a specific time, or a willingness to participate. Captive subjects, such as students in the researcher's own organization, are prominent examples of convenience sampling (Dörnyei, 2007).

Description of Aptis preparation course

All of the participants enrolled in EIC6 courses, HSU's highest level of English for non-majors. The EIC program uses Aptis as its output standard. To satisfy Hoa Sen University's English requirements, EIC 6 students must obtain a CEFR B1 level or above with an Aptis score of 90 to 200. Specifically, in terms of listening abilities, the students can follow clear speech directed in ordinary conversation in a familiar accent; typically follow the major points of extended discussions that people speak clearly; generally follow the main points of extended discussions if people speak clearly; follow TV shows on topics of personal interest when people speak clearly; and understand the information in announcements. Regarding reading skills, students can grasp the essential points in simple texts on personal or professional interests, recognize content that may be of practical value, and comprehend the significant points in short, clear, formal letters related to personal and professional interests.

Design of the Study

The descriptive study was employed in this research since the goal of this study was to find out how students felt about their APTIS issues before and after the preparation course.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was employed as the primary research tool due to the nature of the survey research and the goal of this study. Questionnaires are primarily employed in quantitative research, according to Rowley (2014), especially when researchers seek to investigate behaviors, attitudes, frequencies, or views on certain scales. Furthermore, Creswell (2014) found that questionnaire surveys can assist researchers in collecting huge volumes of data in a short amount of time. Furthermore, it is advised that the questionnaire might take many different forms, such as paper, mail, or internet forms, specific to the research cost. The questionnaire for this study was created in the form of a Google form and distributed to participants over the Internet. Multiple-choice questions were used to gather responses for students' information. Other responses regarding their difficulties were tallied using a 5-point Likert scale ranging

from "1" strongly disagree to "5" strongly agree. The data were evaluated for Mean (\bar{X}) and Standard deviation (SD) after it was collected (Std.).

In terms of designing the research instrument, the questionnaire was adopted and adapted from the study of Kantarin et al. (2013). The modifications were implemented to make the research more suitable. In order to examine the effectiveness of the preparation course on students' perception towards the difficulties in taking Aptis test listening and speaking, there were two versions of questionnaires. Particularly, the first questionnaire was distributed to the student at the beginning of the preparation course, and the second one was distributed after they finished the course. In addition, before and after taking the preparation course, the students were required to take the simulation tests, which had the same format and level of difficulty as the original Aptis test. Therefore, the questionnaires were distributed after the students took these two simulation tests.

The first online questionnaire was divided into two sections, each containing 18 questions. Section 1 asked participants about their gender, experience, and preparation for the Aptis reading and listening test before they started the course. Apart from analyzing difficulties during the reading and listening in section 1, the second section also contained questions about students' opinions of the Aptis preparation course in section 2.

Validity & Reliability

Some approaches were employed in the research to assure the research's validity and reliability. The questionnaire has been modified and adjusted based on Kantarin's study (2013), as indicated in the "Research Tools" section. Then, with 67 participants, a questionnaire survey was undertaken to determine the measuring capabilities of all items. After that, minor improvements were made to the questionnaire to generate the final version. In the discovery part, further approaches connected to the statistical indicators in the program will be discussed.

Results/Findings

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1.

Students' genders

Gender	Number	Percent
Male	25	37.3
Female	42	62.7

Table 1 shows a total of 67 students from three EIC 6 courses took part in the study. The females outnumbered the men by a ratio of 42 to 25.

Table 2.

Students' experience in Aptis

Question	Responses	
	Yes	No
Have you taken Aptis listening and reading before?	7	60
%	10.4	89.6

Table 2 reveals that just 7 students had previously taken an Aptis test, with the majority (60) having never done this.

Table 3.

Students' preparation for Aptis

Question	Responses		
	Not yet	A little	Well-prepared
How much did you prepare for the test?	15	51	1
%	22.4	76.1	1.5

Table 3 depicts the students' Aptis preparation. Only 4 students were well-prepared, 15 of them did nothing, and the remaining 76% did a little.

Students' problems with listening pre-test

Table 4.

Students' problems with listening pre-test

Questions	Mean	Std.	Level
1 You don't understand the instructions	3.76	1.06	high
2 While listening you were translating into Vietnamese	3.97	0.97	high
3 You had to skip a question or section due to still answering the previous one.	4.22	0.97	high
4 The unfamiliar voices were a problem.	3.94	0.99	high
4 The time between each listening was long enough.	3.70	1.09	high
6 The lack of vocabulary was a problem in the test.	4.09	0.81	high
7 You don't have enough time to check your answers	3.49	1.08	moderate
Average	3.9	1.00	

Table 4 depicts the students' perspectives on the Aptis listening pre-test. In general, the students believed they had major issues with the pre-test in every subject. There are 2 factors that stand out: skipping a question or section ($\bar{X} = 4.22$, Std.= 0.99) and the lack of vocabulary ($\bar{X} = 4.09$, Std.= 0.81). However, when asked if they thought the exam gave them adequate time to check their responses, the average level of agreement was attained ($\bar{X} = 3.49$, Std.= 1.08).

Students' problems with reading pre-test

Table 5.

Students' problems with reading pre-test

Questions	Mean	Std.	Level	
1	You don't understand the instructions	2.08	0.99	low
2	While read, you had to translate into Vietnamese	3.48	1.02	moderate
3	You had to skip some questions because you didn't understand the reading texts.	3.61	0.98	high
4	The time for reading texts was not long enough.	3.40	1.16	moderate
5	The lack of vocabulary was a problem in the test.	3.94	1.09	high
6	You don't have enough time to check your answers.	3.27	1.12	moderate
7	You don't understand the questions.	2.92	1.03	moderate
8	Having understood the questions, you were still unable to find the answers.	3.24	1.21	moderate
	Average	3.2	1.08	

Table 5 displays the results of the analysis of the students' perceptions of their pre-test reading difficulties. The participants rated their pre-test reading difficulties as moderate on average ($\bar{X} = 3.2$, Std. = 1.08). With the greatest average score (3.94) and a standard deviation of 1.09, the absence of vocabulary fell into the high agreement zone. When taking examinations, it appears that many students tended to translate texts and questions into their home tongue ($\bar{X} = 3.48$, Std. = 1.02). The lack of time to finish texts was rated at 3.40, with a standard deviation of 1.16, indicating that some students strongly agreed with this statement. Furthermore, a lack of time to double-check your answers and an inability to locate the answers are still major issues. On the contrary, just a small number of students indicated that they did not comprehend the exam instructions ($\bar{X} = 2.08$, Std. = 0.99).

Students' problems with listening post-test

Table 6.

Students' problems with listening post-test

Questions	Mean	Std.	Level
1 You don't understand the instructions	1.50	0.66	low
2 While listening, you were translating into Vietnamese	2.40	1.01	low
3 You had to skip a question or section due to still answering the previous one.	2.74	1.60	moderate
4 The unfamiliar voices were a problem.	2.51	1.38	moderate
4 The time between each listening was long enough.	2.13	0.96	low
6 The lack of vocabulary was a problem in the test.	2.18	1.326	low
7 You don't have enough time to check your answers	2.29	1.107	low
	2.25	1.15	

Table 6 reflects the students' perceptions concerning their difficulties with the Aptis post-test listening. The students, overall, had a low opinion of their post-test issues ($\bar{X}=2.25$, Std.=1.15). The number of students who agreed with the difficulties they faced reduced significantly as compared to the pre-test. Only a tiny fraction of participants believe they did not comprehend the exam instructions ($\bar{X}=1.50$, Std.=0.66). Unfamiliar voices ($\bar{X}=2.51$, Std.=1.38) and skipping questions ($\bar{X}=2.74$, Std.=1.60) were decreased from "high" to "moderate."

Students' problems with reading post-test

Table 7.

Students' problems with reading post-test

Questions	Mean	Std.	Level
1 You don't understand the instructions	1.37	0.75	low
2 While reading, you had to translate into Vietnamese	3.49	1.02	moderate
3 You had to skip some questions because you didn't understand the reading texts.	2.54	1.19	moderate
4 The time for reading texts was not long enough.	2.37	1.25	low
4 The lack of vocabulary was a problem in the test.	2.22	1.23	low
6 You don't have enough time to check your answers.	2.50	1.32	moderate
7 You don't understand the questions.	2.56	0.82	moderate
8 Having understood the questions, you were still unable to find the answers.	3.29	1.24	moderate
Average	2.54	1.10	moderate

The students' perceptions of their issues with the Aptis reading post-test are shown in Table 7. Overall, the students had a moderate perception of their issues ($\bar{X} = 2.64$, S.D.=1.10). When compared to the pre-test, the number of participants who agreed with the questions is likewise significantly lower. Concerning translating texts and questions into Vietnamese ($\bar{X} = 3.29$), it appears that some students still had significant difficulty, while the percentage of students who were unable to answer questions remains around 3.2 standard deviation is at 1.24. Other issues have a tendency to diminish or drastically decrease consent.

Students' Opinions on Aptis Preparation Course

Table 8.

Students' Opinions on Aptis Preparation Course

Questions	Mean	Std.	Level
1 The Aptis lessons gave you more confidence in taking the test.	3.85	0.885	high
2 The lessons improved your test-taking strategy.	3.63	0.809	high
3 The lessons improved your vocabulary.	3.97	0.810	high
4 The lessons improved your grammar and structure.	4.28	0.619	high
5 The lessons improved your listening skills.	3.68	0.969	high
6 The lessons improved your reading skills.	3.74	0.857	high
7 The course was long enough.	3.68	0.953	high
8 You are confident of scoring at least 90 in a real Aptis test.	2.71	1.134	moderate
9 Practicing listening and reading tests in Aptis format on Mlearning helps you to be more confident.	3.85	0.80	high
	3.71	0.87	

Table 8 shows that the students had a high level of agreement with the Aptis preparation course's provision ($\bar{X} = 3.71$, Standard = 0.87). The only thing that sticks out is the confidence in scoring 90 on an actual test with an average of 2.71 (Std. = 0.80).

There was a decrease in agreement on not comprehending the exam instructions in terms of listening abilities, with the average decreasing from 3.76 to 1.50. This demonstrates that classroom practice, as well as activities on the Mlearning system, had assisted students toward becoming used to the method of performing listening comprehension skills. Similarly, a lack of vocabulary was cited as a difficulty in the listening section, which dropped from 4.10 to 3.66. Other challenges, such as skipping questions, a lack of vocabulary, or hearing strange voices, had a considerably lower average rate. Apparently, the course equipped students with critical test-taking abilities and methods, as well as new vocabulary and exposure to various native-speaker accents. Elsewhere in the reading section, students virtually failed to translate texts and questions into Vietnamese, with a pre-test average of 3.48 and a post-test average of 3.49. Similarly, comprehending the question but not being able to discover the correct answer maintained the average at 3.2. This demonstrates that students' tendency to translate when

reading passages for exercises is an issue that should be carefully considered when designing a course, and teachers should work on improving students' background knowledge and test-taking capacities. Hence, students may determine the most appropriate response once they have grasped the question. Other issues with reading comprehension abilities improved noticeably. The comments of the students on the course were almost unanimous. Many students, in particular, felt that preparing listening and reading examinations in Aptis format on mlearning helped them gain confidence. However, the majority of students remain skeptical that they will get a score of 90 or better on the Aptis exam. This is reasonable since students may be concerned about the differences between the sample exam and the actual examination, as well as other affecting elements such as sound quality, nerves, and so on.

Discussion

The study's objective was to discover the challenges faced by non-English major students at Hoa Sen University when taking the Aptis reading and listening test. It is possible to detect a number of issues that kids have with both listening and reading comprehension skills in the literature.

Students' issues with listening comprehension included a lack of vocabulary, grammar, background knowledge, and grasping the notion that the speaker is attempting to express. These are inextricably linked to previous research by Underwood (1989), Anderson (1995), and Goh (2000). Additionally, one of the most difficult problems for students was dealing with a variety of voices, which is comparable to Khamprated's study (2012). Finally, the findings of this study reveal that most students translate into their mother tongue, which is comparable to what Kantarin et al. (2013) discovered. There was a deficiency in vocabulary, which has been confirmed as having a significant impact on reading skills in earlier studies (Hall, 2012; Zuhra, 2015; Tartila et al., 2013). The grammatical understanding was also identified as a barrier in the study, which is similar with Zuhra's findings (2015).

Aside from these similarities, this study has shown several noteworthy findings. First, this is one of the few studies on the Aptis test's reading and listening comprehension skills. Although there is a great deal of research on reading and listening comprehension, as indicated in the introduction and literature review, there is practically little study on the issues that students' issues with these two skills on the Aptis exam. Second, the study also demonstrates how students' perceptions of the challenges they encounter when taking the test vary before and after they take a preparation course. Finally, this study was carried out in the setting of COVID-19, when students were required to complete all of their coursework online. The pre-and post-test questionnaire replies provided a diverse variety of outcomes, indicating that the Aptis preparation course may significantly improve students' academic performance. At the beginning of the course, students in three EIC 6 classrooms had insufficient knowledge and experience taking the Aptis test; however, this improved substantially as the course continued. The post-test results were significantly higher than the pre-test results. The concerns raised in this study will be useful to instructors and educators when creating a course with the objective

of improving Aptis exam outcomes. Cohen (2006) found relatively similar findings as this research when he looked at students' difficulties in taking TOEIC tests. According to the author, a better learning approach for students is to encourage them to improve their English language abilities rather than simply providing them with exam preparation courses. As a result, pupils' lack of vocabulary knowledge is a significant issue, and greater focus should be placed on improving vocabulary knowledge before providing test preparation instruction. Furthermore, Sewell (2005) proposes that additional TOEIC vocabulary training for test-takers be implemented as one of the answers and that instructors should offer students with instructions and methods for taking the exam (Tokunaga 2008). The study's drawback is that it only involved 67 students in three classes during the summer semester of 2021. Investigations with a larger sample size and research into two additional skills, speaking and writing, are required.

Conclusion

The research revealed the problems non-language majors at Hoa Sen University had with the Aptis listening and reading components. Through convenience sampling, 67 people were recruited. Pre-test and post-test questionnaires were provided to participants over the internet, based on prior research. Students were asked to complete online surveys to identify the difficulties they experienced and understand how their perceptions of these issues changed before and after the preparatory course. The results from the data analysis were given in detail in the findings section and compared to other research to determine the study's originality. With an increasing number of educational institutions using the Aptis exam to measure students' English output standards, this study can be viewed as valuable. However, larger-scale surveys incorporating the remaining Aptis test components should be undertaken.

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Biodata

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Strengthening Moral Competence with Commercial Videogames: Integrating Papers Please into Lind's Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion

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ABSTRACT

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Commercial videogames have come a long way since their emergence in the 20th century. They remain, however, widely excluded from educational discourse. A reason is the absence of reliable methodologies that ensure effective learning through videogames. There have been attempts to teach historical or other content-centred topics to students through edutainment software. It is argued, however, that games are much more effective in strengthening cognitive decision-making processes. One of these cognitive abilities is moral competence. This paper discusses the possibilities of strengthening moral competence through integrating the videogame *Papers, Please* into Lind's Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (KMDD®). The goal is to craft a didactic framework in which a measurable learning curve in moral competence can be ensured by selecting games that provide a suitable degree of moral complexity. Through clearly defined goals, well-moderated discussions and streamlined reflections, games hold the potential to complement contemporary reading materials in schools and universities.

Introduction

The promising use of commercial videogames in classrooms has only recently come closer to the attention to educators (Shute et al., 2015; Barr, 2017a; de Sousa, 2017; Bell & Gresalfi, 2017). Since the 1970s, edutainment had been the favoured compromise teachers and parents made regarding the use of videogames in the education of elementary, middle and high school students (Eggenfeldt-Nielsen, 2007, p.263). In addition, legal and financial aspects have "complicated their adoption in public schools" (Brown, 2008, p.121). Edutainment, an idea that emerged from Clark Abt's book *Serious Games from 1970, would serve as blueprint for a future counter-model to commercial and violent videogames and their alleged negative effect on players* (Squire, 2003, p.55; Ferdig, 2016, p.318; Markey & Ferguson, 2017, p.101). Abt

imagined serious games to have "an explicit and carefully thought-out educational purpose" which was "not intended to be played primarily for amusement" (1987, p.9).

Serious games, that are intended to serve an external goal such as learning or fitness (Dörner et al., 2016), were since then often described as "*advergaming* (advertisement), *edutainment* (education), and *exergaming* (health and wellness)" (Ferdig, 2016, p.319). Edutainment was therefore deployed as unharmed rationalised play, or in Sutton-Smith's words, "adult control of children's play: to stimulate it, negate it, exclude it, or encourage limited forms of it" (2001, p.49). However, the *career* of edutainment is arguably of a somewhat failed nature (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2007; Ferdig, 2016; Barr, 2017b). With *failed* meaning here having failed to engage pupils and teachers sustainably with the medium and thus enhance learning comprehension efficiently compared to conventional didactic methods (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2007, pp.267-268).

Bruckmann's curious term "chocolate-dipped broccoli" (1999) sums up the central issue of edutainment. Students easily detect its dubious design, which appropriates play for educational purposes (Barr 2017b, p.293). Edutainment titles seldom live up to the expectations they set out for educators and students and do in reality little to tackle "pervasive student disengagement" (Hamari et al., 2016, p.170).

The reasons for that are as follows: *little intrinsic motivation* (edutainment offers no end in itself), *exogenous game mechanics* (playing and learning do not merge into a cohesive experience in edutainment), *limited player agency* (players can barely influence events in the game), and *no teacher presence* (no control over learning outcomes) (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2020, p.253).

Accepting the failure of edutainment to educate and engage students means looking back at what has been there before already, namely, commercial videogames. Instead of producing games that become tools of pre-existing school curricula, available games must be critically interrogated for what they *can* teach or help teaching. No longer should we ask "'Does this game work?', but rather 'Under what conditions does this game work?'" (Ferdig, 2016, p.322).

This paradigm shift leading to the use of commercial videogames in classrooms corresponds to the question of what should be taught at schools at all nowadays (Anetta, 2008, p.231; Shute et al. 2015, p.58; Barr 2017a, p.86). Researchers and educators stress the importance of skills that prepare students for their adult/civic life and increase their employability on the job market (Kay & Greenhill, 2011; Virtanen & Tynjälä, 2018; Succi & Canovi, 2020; Hiroyuki 2021). These skills include, among others, "problem-solving, communication, resourcefulness or adaptability" (Barr, 2017b, p.283). But also ambiguity tolerance (Storme et al., 2017, p.274) and democratic behaviour (Lind, 2012 p.62).

Latter skills have become more critical in diverse and inclusive western societies where people of different cultures and identities rely on well-disposed social organisation, mediation, cooperation and representation (Gray, 2014; Colombo, 2015, p.816, Mbembe, 2017, p.177-178, Cole & Zammit, 2020, p.21). Georg Lind argues that increased moral competence, which enables democratic behaviour, is a key to "more peace, a strong decline in all types of

corruption, crime, war and misuse of power" through resolving "conflicts by weighing moral principles and through discussions with people who have a dissenting opinion" (2019, p.110).

However, while the number of new skills that have to be learned increases, practical methods to foster and advance these skills sustainably remain sparse. Even though edutainment could not live up to these tasks, various studies have proven commercial videogames to be ready at hand for that purpose (Shute et al., 2015; Barr, 2017a; de Sousa, 2017; Bell & Gresalfi, 2017).

This paper introduces moral competence as a progressive skill that should and can be taught at schools with the help of videogames. To do so, the paper intends to introduce the notion of moral competence to the reader and present the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (KMDD®) as an effective tool to increase students' moral competence. Moreover, the game *Papers, Please* (Pope, 2013) is presented and outlined by key characteristics that make it a suitable videogame to complement the KMDD®. Further, the reader is walked through a theoretical KMDD® session with *Papers, Please* as the object of discussion. At the end, a conclusion discussed the central perspectives of the paper.

2. Moral Competence

Moral competence is the ability to translate one's moral orientations into action (Lind, 2019). Lind argues that "moral orientations, as Socrates and Kant assumed, are innate instincts common to all people. People all over the world share the same basic moral ideals" (2019, p.10). These orientations are internalised in childhood and part of becoming a member of society. Therefore, teaching ethics in the eyes of Lind is futile, because everyone already possesses intuitive moral principles. However, what has to be taught is moral competence, "the ability to solve problems and conflicts through deliberating and discussion based on moral principles" (Lind 2019, p.7). Higher moral competence correlates with greater political and civic engagement (Lind 1987, p.94; Winston, 2002, p.9; Lind, 2012, p.70).

Arguably, the most crucial fact about moral competence is that it can be measured empirically, by employing a test with high validity, that has been in use for over forty years and has been translated into almost forty languages. (Lind 2019, p.14). The Moral Competence Test (MCT), in its standard version, consists of two fictional moral dilemmas that are presented to participants and takes around 15 minutes (Lind 2019, p.57). In these fictional stories, a protagonist solves these dilemmas. Participants enter on an inverted numeric scale in how far they agree or disagree with the protagonist's actions. A score from 0-100 is then calculated for the participants. "The Moral Competence Test has been submitted to rigorous tests of its theoretical and empirical validity. It meets all criteria even though these are more rigorous than the criteria usually used in educational and psychological measurement" (Lind 2019, p.63).

Most experiments that use the MCT help to highlight the phenomenon of having moral principles, but possessing no competence to deploy them. In an experiment by Sharon McNamee in 1977, participants were instructed in a room on a task. While they were listening

to the instructor, an actor passed by and staged a collapse. The study "found that participants with low levels of moral competence were less likely to help people in distress." (Lind 2021, p.90). Participants with higher moral competence scores were among the people who helped the collapsed actor, while participants with lower scores remained primarily passive. However, the moral orientations of all participants were mostly similar. "They have, as these and other studies show, often the same high moral ideals and are just as willing to help. They lack only the ability to make decisions in a short time. In many situations, this is crucial" (Lind 2019, p.74).

Many studies empirically prove the point of McNamee's experiment repeatedly (Asch, 1955; Kohlberg, 1984; Prehn, 2013). The lack of moral competence is a social issue that disrupts peaceful and progressive co-existence, making us more susceptible to the use of violence, deceit, or submission to autocratic authorities in order to solve conflicts (Lind, 2021, p.91). The most efficient way to address this deficit is to begin strengthening the moral competence of teenagers (age 11-16), as meta-analyses show the most significant potential to increase moral competence in this age group (Lind, 2019, p.93). Hence, education must be aware of the need for ways to foster moral competence among students. Effectively, "enabling students to experience self-determination and moral-democratic ways of dealing with others in an atmosphere free of compulsion and fear is one of the core tasks of education in and for democracy" (Lind, 2012, p.70).

But besides positive outcomes in a social sense, moral competence is also capable of improving the quality of life for individuals. The ability to efficiently translate one's internalised moral intuitions into actions helps to tackle various problems in one's private life and decreases mental stress caused by decision-making procrastination (Lind, 2019, p.75). Moral competence nourishes an optimistic and courageous attitude towards facing complex problems with uncertain outcomes and decreases inner conflict of opposing wants and orientations. Which moreover supports focusing on one's personal development and individual projects (Lind, 2019, p.76).

3. Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (KMDD®)

Being able to measure moral competence does, however, not suffice to influence or strengthen it. The Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion by Georg Lind (KMDD®), based on Blatt and Kohlberg's dilemma discussion method (1975), is a licensed, certified, and practical strategy that has proven to increase moral competence through making use of *communicative action* (Habermas, 1990).

KMDD® sessions last 90 minutes and need at least 15 participants. A dilemma is presented, followed by a brief period of individual reflection. Further, a concise first discussion is opened to assess the detection of the dilemma by the participants. Then the participants are asked to join in little groups (2-3 persons) to prepare for a plenary discussion. The beginning and end of the session are framed by pre- and post-assessments of the Moral Competence scores of the

participants. (Lind, 2019, p.102). Sessions are suggested to be held twice a year. The success of the KMDD® also depends strongly on the didactic qualities of the teachers, who require official KMDD® training to be certified. (Lind, 2019, p.103)

By providing these workshops, the central goal of the KMDD® is to foster and advance moral competence. This is accomplished by making one sensitive toward moral feelings and allowing one to articulate these. In addition participants are made to consider situations more objectively and to find compromises in order to resolve conflicts between one's moral principles. Moreover, confidence to communicate one's own moral resolutions against opposing ones is strengthened, which shall increase efficiency in making moral decisions under pressure. Ideally, participants learn to tolerate and value different perspectives and thoughts on moral conflicts (Lind, 2019, pp.98-99).

To enable these learning effects, the KMDD® must follow certain conditions:

Optimal learning climate

A relatable dilemma for participants is crucial to increase engagement and learning effect through an environment of interest. Sessions are supposed to be essentially self-moderated and governed by the *ping-pong rule* (i.e., arguments are exchanged spontaneously in dialogue). Effectively granting participants more agency increases involvement. To facilitate comfort for the participants, discussions must always target the dilemma and not be directed at people. Participants shall not be judged for their arguments. The role of the teacher is to enforce these principles, allowing self-moderation, but not to influence the discussion itself. (Lind, 2019, p.99)

Semi-real dilemma stories

Selected dilemmas for a session need to be semi-real. They need to represent *relatable* events (i.e., a policeman considers torturing a kidnapper to rescue an abducted child). Still, they cannot be based on *actual* events (i.e., the kidnapping of Jakob Metzler, during which a German police officer threatened the abductor with torture if he would not reveal the child's location). This enables sufficient engagement with the dilemma without exceeding a degree of emotionality, which would eventually undermine the principles of a session (i.e., ping-pong rule, making no judgments about other participants) (Lind, 2019, p.99).

Support and challenge

Alternating phases of support and challenge by the teacher create a stable learning environment. Through minimal intervention by the teacher, clues or perspectives can be given to participants to help the flow of the discussion in either making it easier or more challenging for participants to talk about the dilemma (Lind, 2019, p.99). Basically, maintaining an equal level of challenge among all participants.

Self-moderation

The discussion should be essentially self-moderated. It is crucial to let participants remain autonomous in how they contribute to the debate. Becoming more morally competent means becoming more active in decision-making processes. Hence, participants must engage in discussions and decisions on positions they take to achieve a learning effect. The more moderation is required in a session, the lesser the learning effect will be (Lind, 2019, p.100).

Factual orientation versus personal orientation

The quality of discussions in KMDD® sessions and subsequent learning effects are fundamentally based on the kind of arguments deployed by its participants. Participants should be encouraged to use objective moral reasoning based on facts and logical principles instead of personal opinions based on prejudice and affection. That quality difference needs to be understood by participants and, if necessary, highlighted by the teacher.

The KMDD® has been in use for around two decades and has been constantly modified to increase learning outcomes for participants. Lind's licensed method has been successfully deployed in various social and professional contexts, such as schools, universities, military academies, corporations and other institutions (Lind, 2006; Bardzinski & Szopka, 2011; Serodio et al., 2016; Lind, 2019; Stec et al., 2021).

The biggest issue with the approach remains within institutions and individuals themselves, as in many cases, increased moral competence is not sustained. Moral competence can also degenerate if humans decrease their engagement in social, civic or political discussion (Lind 2019, p.84), where they can perform *communicative action* as an act of deliberating critically, yet peacefully, to reach a shared understanding (Habermas, 1990, p.149). This indicates that the KMDD® may increase moral competence immediately, but its effective purpose is another. Namely, to promote a toolkit of discussion strategies for its participants, which they must repeatedly consult in their future lives to achieve a sustainable gain in moral competence, eventually paving the way for a better co-existence (Lind 2019, p.110).

4. Papers, Please

The videogame *Papers, Please* by Lucas Pope from 2013 operates arguably like a serious game, resembling a job training mini-game (Lellock, 2015). In the game, players take the role of a border guard officer in the fictional communist state Arstotzka. Players are offered a mixed visual perspective in 2D, in which one has a first-person view with two perspectives (frontal and towards the desk) in the patrol office on the lower half of the screen, and an isometric view of the surroundings on the upper half (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 Admitting an immigrant in *Papers, Please* © B. Hanussek

In the game, players decide on admitting or rejecting immigrants on basis of processing their documents. Further context through the games' narrative transforms almost every decision into a moral conflict (Formosa et al., 2016, p.212). The game and level design are essentially constructed around a cyclical nine-to-five job schedule, where players process documents in their office. At the end of a cycle, players are informed about their financial situation and the health of their family members. Players earn money per successfully admitted or rejected immigrant and receive fines if they fail to process documents properly. With the money earned, one has to provide for the officer's family through food and medicine (see Figure 2). However, a main story about terrorists trying to overthrow the state, and (multiple) sub-narratives, like the personal perils of certain immigrants, unfold over the course of succeeding cycles in the game.



Figure 2 Paying bills and providing for one's family © B. Hanussek

Papers, Please has been interpreted by some to represent the downfall of the Soviet regime or anti-immigration politics in Arizona (Kelly, 2018, p.416). Game creator Lucas Pope has denied any direct links to real-world events and stated that the game should primarily stress the dilemma of making complex decisions under time pressure, financial stress and a corrupt climate (Kelly, 2018, p.416).

In the game, one will often have to make decisions with uncertain outcomes in an environment of systemic *unfairness*. The game design intentionally makes it difficult for players to make morally right decisions through its scripted approach and attempt to streamline the player's gameplay experience (Formosa et al., 2016, p.213). The player shall, as Pope stated, experience the complexities of realistic moral pondering in simulating a stressful and unfair environment where decisions receive no direct feedback and where time is against us (Sicart, 2019, p.151).

In the game, players decide to admit or reject illegal immigrants after listening to their heart-breaking stories, knowing that they will face death if they return to their country. Players can accept bribes from colleagues and make more cash by detaining more immigrants if they are running out of money to help their family. Players can assist terrorists in their attempt to overthrow the corrupt regime that they are working for or remain loyal to the state. Either way, players have to deal with acts of impending violence.

The list of these moral encounters in *Papers, Please* is long, and its *moral complexity* through its alternatives and commentary on violence and deceit (Hanussek et al., 2021, p.216) is intriguing. The game offers much to ponder and a playing experience one could categorise as non-entertaining in a normative sense (Barr 2017a, p.88; Morrisette, 2017).

The game has been analysed thoroughly over the years (Bourg, 2014; Lellock, 2015; Lopez, 2015; Formosa et al., 2016; Derk, 2016; Lohmeyer, 2017; Morrisette, 2017; Sicart, 2019). Therefore, deeper insight into the moral complexities of the game is not the objective of this paper. Instead, focus is to establish a set of characteristics that demonstrate *Papers, Please* as a suitable complement to a KMDD® session for high school students. Characteristics are (a) moral complexity; (b) representation; (c) mechanics/difficulty; (d) rating; (e) developer type; (f) costs; (g) system requirements and (h) academic backlog. These traits have been chosen to increase accessibility for teachers and students alike (Brown 2008: 121) and correspond to aspects of the KMDD®.

(a) Moral complexity

Moral complexity in videogames is the degree to which game design offers alternatives and commentary to violence and deceit to players (Hanussek et al., 2021). That means that a game like *Grand Theft Auto V* (Rockstar Games, 2013), that centres its gameplay experience essentially around violent and deceitful acts with little or no alternatives or commentary to them, contains low moral complexity. That does not mean that such games cannot be used at all as an object of dilemma discussion. However, they need critical contextualisation and explanation by a teacher, which contradicts the self-moderation principle of the KMDD®. A game such as *Papers, Please* on the other hand, exhibits high moral complexity as it technically

always allows for non-violent or non-deceitful alternatives to moral conflicts. In addition, the game does offer frequent critical commentary through its dialogues and overall cynical atmosphere. Thus, allowing deeper individual reflection. It is essential to mention that the games' "string of beads" structure ensures a streamlined experience even with players retaining their agency (Formosa et al., 2016, p.219). That means that even though players have alternatives, there are key events in the game's progress that are part of every playthrough. This aspect is crucial for ensuring that all pupils experience the same key sections in the game.

(b) Representation

Most videogames are poetic representations of real-world objects (i.e., persons, cultures, events, epochs, etc.). That means that they do not faithfully translate into what they represent, yet they function as a creative amalgamation of their authors' beliefs and opinions on something (Young, 1999, p.133). While Pope dements any real-world association, it is out of the question that *Papers, Please* bears a representation of the Cold War epoch and communist Realpolitik in former soviet countries (Kelly, 2018, p.417). That means that pupils from post-soviet countries are likely to relate differently to the game than pupils from western countries. In how far that would benefit or disturb a KMDD® session needs empirical testing. However, it is not unlikely to think that a session with *Papers, Please* in high school could increase interest in history classes that discuss the Cold War during the same year (cp. Chapman, 2016, p.31). This means that the game's theme needs to be considered with care in regards to its audience, so as to increase engagement.

(c) Mechanics/difficulty

Mechanics are integral rules of videogames that restrict how a game is operated and determine to a large extent the gameplay experience and difficulty (Hunicke et al., 2004). With accessibility in mind, one needs to select games with necessary but not complicated mechanics. The more rules to learn, the more difficult it is for inexperienced players to operate a game in a *flow* state, during which their experience is considered to be optimal (Csikszentmihaly, 2002). Assuming that not all pupils (and teachers) possess the same competencies in gaming (cf. Paul, 2018, p.132), one needs to choose games that are neither competitive nor too complex, yet challenging enough to drive engagement. *Papers, Please* makes a fair candidate under these conditions. Its controls are simple and can be entirely operated by mouse clicks. The rules under which immigrants have to be rejected or accepted are introduced in a well-designed onboarding experience (i.e., explanation of mechanics while beginning to play). Rules are alternated and expanded and establish a learning curve for the players in learning and applying them in-game. Time pressure is also part of the experience, which enhances the experience of having to make decisions under stressful circumstances. Moral decisions in the game become implicit mechanics in the course of the game, and the difficulty of solving those depends on players' moral competence.

(d) Ratings

PEGI or USK ratings evaluate specific content in videogames (i.e., violence, nudity, drug reference, language) and set out binding age restrictions (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2020, pp.166-167). It is not just important in the context of legality, to think about ratings in games before using them for students, but it also helps to address specific audiences. In the case of high school students, games with 18+ ratings should be excluded in general because it would exclude pupils from playing who are not of legal age yet. Games with a 16+ rating make sense not only from a legal, but also from an engagement perspective. High school students that are at least sixteen years old could eventually have an issue with games of lower ratings that cater to younger audiences by their use of language and imagery. *Papers, Please* possesses a 16+ rating, which helps to narrow down its potential audience to upper high school classes.

(e) Developer Type

It is suggested to mind the development background of a game. Deploying videogames in classrooms means being accountable for their background. Video games developed by corporations such as EA, Activision, or RIOT are commonly associated with exploitation, sexism, harassment and dubious business practices (Drummond et al., 2020; Cole & Zammit, 2021; Grind & Needleman, 2021). To avoid double standards, they should be categorically excluded from educational contexts. Strengthening moral competence by making use of games of ominous development processes is morally conflicting. Turning to smaller studios might help facilitate direct exchange between educational institutions and developers (Pearce, 2020), enabling potential cost reduction or even licensing of their titles for schools. *Papers, Please* was developed by a single person, Lucas Pope, a respected game designer, who received various awards for his games that are known to inhibit conceptual or even philosophical depth (Machkovech, 2019).

(f) Costs

To ensure accessibility for pupils, videogames for a KMDD® session should be inexpensive to acquire. In optimum, they should be free for participants. Still, the almost non-existent ties between educational institutions and game developers or publishers make it difficult at this time to think about licensing or discount options for schools. Free games are in most cases unsuitable for moral discussion except for few examples like *Path Out* (Causa Creations, 2014), where one is led through the perils of being a Syrian refugee. *Papers, Please* is, with a fluctuating market price on different online platforms (i.e., Steam, GOG), of about 10€ affordable but not favourable. It is suggested that games should not cost more than 5€. This price is oriented at the cost of common mandatory school readings in high schools in central Europe (i.e., classics, novels).

(g) System requirements

While around 90% of high school students in Europe and the US possess laptops or PCs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), they do not support system requirements for

any kind of game. For low-tier devices (+/- 300€), higher graphics and RAM requirements are an obstacle. In addition, different operating systems are in use (i.e., Windows, macOS, Linux), thus demanding games that function cross-platform. *Papers, Please* has very favourable system requirements that support low-tier models in all regards (i.e., 2GB RAM, basic graphic cards) and all three central operating systems on the market Windows, macOS and Linux (Statista, 2021). Suitable videogames for a KMDD® session running on smartphones would also increase accessibility; however, many mobile games feature casual game design (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2020, p.174), unsuitable for dilemma discussions.

(h) Academic backlog

Videogames that have been part of academic or intellectual discourse by researchers allow deeper involvement with and understanding of the medium by teachers that intend to host a KMDD® session. Further readings on the chosen videogames can also increase the acceptance of the videogame and highlight its educational merits to sceptics such as worried parents who fear moral degradation through the use of videogames (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2020, p.254). As mentioned earlier in this section, *Papers, Please* has been subject to numerous studies and analyses that have provided much thought and insight on the game. It is suggested that these criteria, which have been selected in correspondence to accessibility and to the KMDD®, provide a helpful tool to determine suitable commercial videogames for educational contexts such as a KMDD® session in high school.

5. Integrating *Papers, Please* to KMDD®

The previous two sections outlined the structure and purpose of the KMDD® and *Papers, Please* as a suitable complement for a session with high school classes. The integration of a videogame to a KMDD® session replaces the semi-real dilemma usually presented at the beginning of a section. The first practical problem in integrating these two components is time and place related. To experience an intriguing moral dilemma in a game means spending reasonable time within the game's virtual space to become involved with the world and its characters (cf. Aldred, 2016, p.356; Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. 2020, p.150). To be concerned about one's family in the game means to have gone through a couple of cycles in the game. Above that, potential dilemmas that are chosen for a session can be located at a later point in the game. That means that allowing participant to develop a relationship to the game during a 90-minute KMDD® session is impossible. Another point is having over 15 pupils sitting in one room playing the game, could have a neutralising impact on the individual experience of the game. To get involved with and remain focused on the game, it is recommended to play the game individually in a zoned place (i.e., at home, in the library).

Hence, the only reasonable solution for this circumstance is to make playing the game a prerequisite to the KMDD® session. This also has another benefit besides allowing pupils to take their time and place for playing – as a concern for Lind when choosing the dilemma is to "keep the degree of emotionality in the class on a middle-range level" (2020, p.99). *Papers,*

Please engages and provokes players through its mechanics and the commentary within its narrative, which could influence students and their genuine opinion on moral issues. That could distort the pre-MCT assessment at the beginning of a KMDD® session if it is done immediately after playing. Playing the game on one's own time at least a day before the session decreases reactivity (cp. Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2020, pp.293-294; Franceschini et al., 2021). Lind suggests participants to take notes during a KMDD® session, especially during the presentation of the dilemma (2020, p.102). Therefore, it is recommended that students do that as well, or that they write a videogame diary after a playing session, allowing them to process and store their experience from the virtual space (Mekler et al., 2014, p.433).

During the actual KMDD® session (once the pre-MCT was conducted), a carefully chosen section by the teacher (i.e., key events such as helping/rejecting terrorists or taking bribes for detaining more immigrants) should be presented via in-game footage of a playthrough. That shall help pupils recall their memory of the section and ensure that all students have understood the dilemma. From here on, the KMDD® proceeds in its structure as it is (i.e., individual reflection period; brief opening discussion; preparation in small groups for plenary discussion; plenary discussion; post-MCT). It is important to emphasise that this approach is purely theoretical at this stage and requires practical experimentation and modification with repeated practice to develop a sustainable and effective method, eventually reaching standardisation that helps to foster moral competence among high school students.

6. Conclusion & Discussion

This paper has outlined the failure of edutainment in its *crusade* to educate students around the globe with the use of its interpretation of game design. This failure is however not absolute, as new generations of educational smartphone apps seemingly achieve positive learning outcomes especially in language education (Van et al., 2021, p.30). Despite that, appropriating play for antiquated school curricula is prone to fail. However, the demise of edutainment also revealed another issue. Namely, the needed epistemological transformation in educational institutions. The digital revolution has changed how knowledge is constructed, how learning is processed and which skills are needed to build a sustainable future for oneself in our society.

In this paper it has been argued that moral competence is a future-oriented skill that is urgently needed in our society. Changing moral competence among contemporary adult generations might be unrealistic, but we can invest in future generations. To do so, we need smart frameworks that support effective education. Effective education, in this regard, relies on the autonomous and wilful participation of students in knowledge creation and the strengthening of moral competence. Commercial videogames are ready at hand to endorse this process. Needless to say, tact and flair are necessary when deploying videogames in class, to avoid a similar situation, as with edutainment. Videogames have to be used for what they are best at, namely, engaging people effectively and in this case, engaging students. Games cannot replace teachers, but they can complement their lessons. Combining games such as *Papers, Please* that

fulfil criteria of accessibility with empirically tested frameworks such as the KMDD®, eventually will do the trick. Yet, it demands more empirical research in that field to assess the effectiveness of these approaches. In addition, collaborations between educational institutions and game developers or publishers are urgently needed to provide affordable solutions for all students. School discounts or licensing options for games worth deploying in educational contexts should be part of future discussions in that regard. Also, educational institutions should begin consulting more videogame experts in order to work on didactic frameworks. After all, if one decides to use commercial games, a council of experts would be needed to evaluate the merit of games in specific contexts. Either way, accepting edutainment's bankruptcy is a new chance to approach game-based learning appropriately and sustainably.

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Biodata

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Estimating University Students' Acceptance of Technological Tools for Studying English through the UTAUT Model

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on the results of a questionnaire survey on 289 medical students to predict their acceptance of or resistance to information and communication technology (ICT) tools for learning English through Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, and Davis's UTAUT model. The measurement scale used to estimate their behavioral intention of ICT use for learning English includes six determinants of the UTAUT, namely, *performance expectancy* (PE), *effort expectancy* (EE), *social influence* (SI), *facilitating conditions* (FC), *self-efficacy* (SE) and *perceived anxiety* (PANX) and two dependent factors, namely *behavioral intention* (BI) and *use behavior* (UB). First, the descriptive statistics indicate that the student subjects have sufficient conditions to use ICT for studying English online. Second, the exploratory factor analysis drops PANX from the hypothesized measurement model and reduces the eight original constructs to four by grouping EE and SE, PE and SI, and BI and UB. Second, the confirmatory factor analysis explains the satisfactory model fit indexes with the support of the structural equation model and locates the positive correlations among the variable constructs. After that, the tested hypotheses show that UB is influenced by BI and FC, and BI itself is affected by PE, EE, SI, and SE. Finally, the authors provide the grounded implications on what should be done to effectively increase the students' use of ICT for their learning needs in higher education.

Keywords:

expectancy, performance, behavioral intention, actual use

1. Introduction

The appearance and availability of mobile devices such as smartphones, personal digital assistants or PDAs, and tablet computers make education ubiquitous and contribute much to improved learning (Abbad, 2021). Moreover, the proliferation of ICT use has been transforming education and making it more available for learners, and it has profoundly changed how

knowledge is transmitted and acquired, from exclusively classroom-based instruction to the hybrid of in-class interaction and online learning (Truong, 2021) or full e-learning (Al-Busaidi, 2013). Since the Covid-19 pandemic began in early 2020, universities and schools have switched to home-based e-learning in place of on-campus classes (Blake, 2021; Pham & Vo, 2021; Teh, 2021), which requires more effort (Le, 2021) and ICT literacy (Tran, 2021) from both the teacher and the learners in the new mode of presentation and interaction.

E-learning is defined as the use of computer technology to deliver education or training courses to learners; such courses may be studied online, offline, or by any mixture of these modes (Al-Busaidi, 2013). It is evident that ICT makes the prerequisite for the advent and development of e-learning around the world, as well as the growth of online learning, hybrid learning, and blended learning now. ICT actually enables education to be accessible to students anytime and anywhere (Abu-Al-Aish & Love, 2013), and learning technology researchers always view the Internet both as a means of delivery and as a tool to increase the quality of learning experiences and learning outcomes (Means et al., 2013). In fact, the implementation of e-learning is not simply a technological solution but a process of many different factors such as social and behavioral contexts (Tarhini et al., 2013); therefore, ICT use plays a key role in the success in e-learning implementation.

The literature of ICT use in the educational context exhibits that ICT use could offer students multiple benefits. First of all, the ICT-rich environment has created a good atmosphere for learners (Phan & Huynh, 2021) as it not only helps deliver the lesson well but also contributes to increasing learner engagement and making learning experiences more interesting (Callum, 2011). The prior research also found out that ICT use in the blended learning model could lead to improved learning outcomes (Alamr, 2019; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010; So & Lee, 2013) or improve students' skills (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Baniyassen, 2020). Furthermore, multiple studies indicate that students undergo a positive change in their attitude towards ICT use (Alqasham, 2018), and the students become more autonomous in their learning after being exposed to the blended environment (Challob et al., 2016) or the entire online one (Teh, 2021). In addition to that, some researchers have suggested that ICT tools should be incorporated to boost educational quality (Al-Busaidi, 2013; Callum, 2011; Grgurovic, 2010). Finally, ICT tools can also be employed as a means of education that incorporates self-motivation, communication, efficiency, and technology (Chau, 2021; Tarhini et al., 2016; Tran & Nguyen, 2021).

E-learning implementation is surely a complex process, and the successful use of ICT tools for teaching and learning depends much on understanding how students accept ICT tools (Abbad, 2021). Although there has existed a plethora of researches on predicting user acceptance of ICT tools in the educational context, the number of studies drawing on the UTAUT to estimate medical students' use of ICT for studying English through the learning management system (LMS) is very limited. As a result, the aims of this paper are to figure out the real situation of ICT use to learn English among medical students and locate the factors that influence their acceptance of or resistance to ICT use for learning English online. Also, the findings of this paper are expected to seek the answers to the following research questions.

1. What ICT tools do the student subjects use to study English online?
2. What factors affect their acceptance of ICT tools for learning English?
3. What are the correlations among the constructs of the UTAUT model?

2. Literature review

2.1. ICT tools

ICT refers to any technology that uses the Internet, computers, mobile devices, and applications to search for, share and store information as well as create materials and communicate with other people (Nguyen, 2017). The literature review indicates that the use of ICT tools has its salient root in the Audio-visual Method, and these tools are educationally beneficial to language learners. Their specific applications have grown at a rapid speed for the past decades, and college students have been found to use different ICT tools in the educational context (Chu, 2016).

Before the boom of the web, audio-visual aids such as tapes, radios, cassettes, CD players, overhead projectors, TVs, videotapes, and recorders had been used to assist teaching and learning (Le, 2016). Then, around the 2000s, Web 1.0 such as blogs, Wikipedia or Google was widely used, and people could resort to this static source to search for necessary materials (Ho, 2016; Le, 2016). Since 2004, Web 2.0 has been employed as an interactive source where people can do more active jobs. Presently, Web 2.0 tools are very popular in language classes (Ho, 2016; Le, 2016).

Another classification of ICT tools was suggested by Puentedura (2006). He introduced the SAMR model, which categorizes ICT tools in four major functions, namely *substitution* (Technology acts as a direct tool substitute, with no functional change), *augmentation* (Technology acts as a direct tool substitute, with functional improvement), *modification* (Technology allows for significant task redesign), and *redefinition* (Technology allows for the creation of new tasks, previously unconceivable) (Puentedura, 2006). These four functions can be adopted to facilitate various educational tasks such as teaching, learning, testing and management (Nguyen, 2017).

The final clear-cut grouping of ICT tools was also based on their different functions and applications, and the result is that ICT was placed into four categories (Dang, 2013). This way of categorizing ICT tools is most appropriate for the authors' research needs; thus, they will include this classification in the questionnaire survey.

Table 1. Types of ICT tools for use in education (Dang, 2013)

Tool categories	Examples
<i>Location and retrieval tools</i>	Search engines: Google, Yahoo, Bing, Youtube, Teachertube, TV, Radio and the like
<i>Material creation tools</i>	Word processors, presentation software (PowerPoint, Prezzi), authoring programs (hot potatoes, task magic, and fun with texts), audio and video editing tools, e-lecture tools to merge movies into slides, make movies and mind maps, and the like
<i>Interaction tools</i>	Students' computers and smartphones connected with teachers' computers, Learning Management Systems, or social networks
<i>Teaching tools</i>	PowerPoint or Keynote presentation Prezzi used with projectors.

To summarize, using ICT tools for teaching and learning has been a trend, especially when college students are very ITC-inclined and they like doing things with ICT tools (Chu, 2016). The literature review also indicates that the present-day classrooms of English are concerned with what ICT tools are employed and when and how they are exploited to make teaching and learning more interesting and effective. Thus, the authors of this paper will attempt to explore the various factors that affect the students' attitude and intention to use ICT in the e-learning environment in order to understand and estimate their actual use of ICT.

2.2 Technology acceptance models

There have been several competing models explaining the relationships between the determinants that would affect an individual's technology acceptance, and the widely-adopted ones are Davis's Technology Acceptance Model (1989), Azjen's Theory of Planned Behavior (1991) and Venkatesh et al.'s Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (2003).

Davis (1989) explored how perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEU) affected user acceptance of technology which was explained through the two dependent factors: attitude to use (ATU) and intention to use (ITU). In his Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the two principal factors are PU and PEU, which are defined as the user's belief that the technology will improve their performance or help them perform their job better (Davis, 1989) and as to how easy the user perceives the new technology is to use respectively (ibid). In the TAM, PEU and PU are the predictors of ATU. Then, ATU results in the behavioral intention of whether to use or not use the technology (ITU). This model has gained support for being powerful in predicting the early adoption of new technologies in numerous contexts and different situations, including education (Callum, 2011; Tarhini et al., 2013). After that, the TAM was extended with the addition of external variables such as job relevance and ICT experience, which are believed to positively influence PU and PEU (Davis et al., 1992). Although used widely in educational settings, Davis' TAM (1989) was criticized for not generating consistent and conclusive results, and the model is too simple in its nature (Shachak et al., 2019).

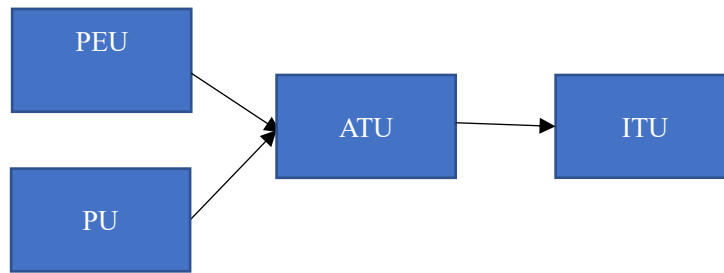


Figure 1. Davis's TAM (Davis, 1989)

Another popular model is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which was proposed by Ajzen (1991). It was extended from his earlier co-authored model named the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen, 1991). He kept the TRA's attitude towards act or behavior (ATA) and subject norm (SN), and added the perceived behavioral control (PBC) (Ajzen, 1991; Callum, 2011; Venkatesh et al., 2003). In more detail, ATA is perceived as an individual's positive or negative feelings of performing the behavior, and it is formed by his/her belief and evaluation of that target behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Then, SN refers to the social influence and is gauged by the normative belief of the ways others expect an individual should behave (Ajzen, 1991). Finally, the PBC relates to the perception and assessment by an individual of his/her ability and resources to perform a behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Overall, these three independent constructs are hypothesized to generate a great impact on users' behavioral intention to use (BIU), which is then theorized to affect individual behavior (IB) (Callum, 2011).

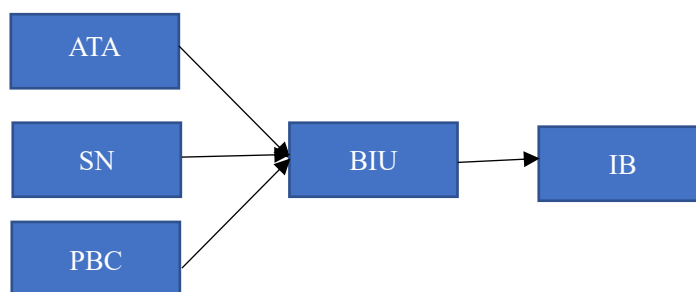


Figure 2. Ajzen's TPB (Ajzen, 1991)

Ajzen's TPB has been exploited to explore a wide range of human behaviors; however, the criticism is that the model is too simplistic in nature to truly determine the adoption, and the two original determinants are too similar (Callum, 2011). This model is also criticized for not putting external barriers into consideration (Taherdoost, 2017).

The most recently validated model adopted to estimate individual acceptance of ICT use is the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), which was introduced by Venkatesh et al. (2003). It was the unified model of eight earlier validated models, including the TPB and the TAM (Shachak et al., 2019; Venkatesh et al., 2003). In fact, all the elements from those eight previous models are incorporated to define their theorized determinants of

intention and/or usage (Shachak et al., 2019; Venkatesh et al., 2003). In the end, they produced a unified model in which user acceptance of ICT is influenced by four determinants: PE, EE, SI and FC and four key moderating variables: *age*, *gender*, *experience* and *voluntariness*.

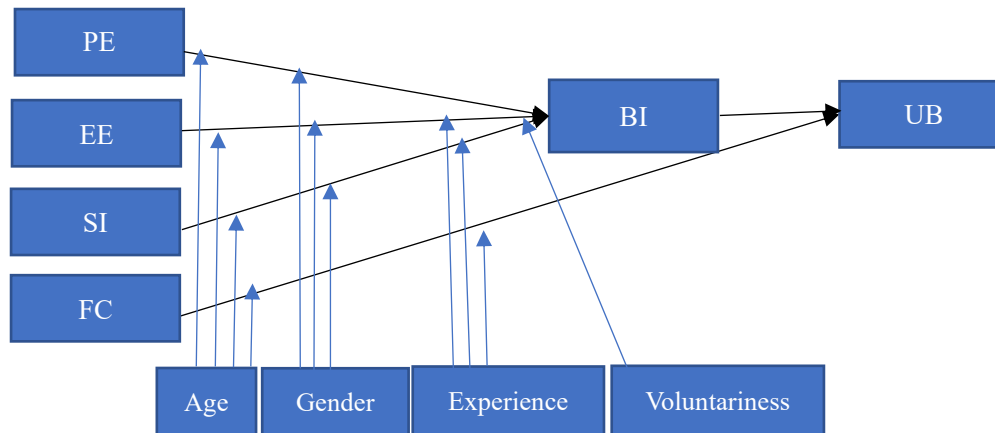


Figure 3. Venkatesh et al.'s UTAUT (2003)

In the measurement model above, PE gauges the degree to which an individual perceives that using the system could help improve job performance (Callum, 2011; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Whether ICT use is voluntary or mandated, this factor always remains the strongest predictor of user acceptance of ICT tools (Jaradat & Banikhaled, 2013; Lescevic et al., 2013; Puspitasari et al., 2019; Venkatesh et al., 2003; Zuiderwijk et al., 2015), and the strong influence of PE on BI is moderated by gender and age (Venkatesh et al., 2003). In its nature, PE has a lot of similarities to PU in the TAM and has its roots in extrinsic motivation (Callum, 2011).

EE refers to the degree to which an individual perceives that the system will be easy to use (Venkatesh et al., 2003). This construct has been empirically proven to be a strong predictor of ICT use (Abbad, 2021; Berlilana et al., 2017; Jaradat & Banikhaled, 2013; Lescevic et al., 2013; Zuiderwijk et al., 2015), and in its nature, it is very similar to PEU in Davis's TAM (1989). Furthermore, Venkatesh et al. (2003) claimed that EE is most salient for women, particularly those who are older and with relatively little experience with the system, indicating that the direct impact of EE on BI is moderated by age, gender and experience.

SI is defined as the degree to which the user believes that others about whom they care feel that they should use the system (Venkatesh et al., 2003). This factor is very similar to the TPB's SN (Callum, 2011; Shachak et al., 2019), and its influence on BI (Nordhoff et al., 2020) is moderated by age, gender, experience, and voluntariness (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Additionally, Venkatesh et al. (2003) posited that SI directly impacts user acceptance of ICT tools when ICT use is mandated, and that increasing experience provides a more instrumental basis for individual intention to use ICT. It is also found that women tend to be more sensitive to others' opinions than men, and ICT use is more salient for older people (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

FC measures the degree to which an individual perceives that support and assistance are available to them to use their system (Venkatesh et al., 2003). This has a close link to the TPB's PC (Callum, 2011; Shachak et al., 2019) and is the direct determinant of user behavior (Abbad, 2021); however, when both FC and EE are incorporated in the model, FC is not significant in predicting user intention to use or BI (Venkatesh et al., 2003). The effect is expected to increase with experience, and older people attach more importance to receiving technical help and assistance than young ones; thus, the effect of FC on UB is moderated by age and gender (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Zuiderwijk et al., 2015).

Besides the above-mentioned direct determinants, the UTAUT consists of two indirect ones. SE is the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1997). SE in ICT use then refers to their judgment of their own ability to use ICT tools (Venkatesh et al., 2003), and it has been hypothesized to affect user attitude to use ICT indirectly (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Callum, 2011; Tarhini et al., 2016; Abbad, 2021). Moreover, PANX of ICT use refers to the fear that some people have when using or being confronted with ICT use (Callum, 2011). Davis (1989) claimed that the easier the system, the less effort one needs to operate it and the more effort he or she can allocate to other activities. Prior research has found that PANX is conceptually and empirically distinct from PEU, and it is one of the factors that indirectly influence BI (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

The dependent constructs of the UTAUT are BI and UB. BI refers to the user attitude towards using technology and is usually defined as an individual's overall affective reaction to using a system (Venkatesh et al., 2003). It results in user behavior (UB) (Ajzen & Cote, 2008) of whether to use or not to use the technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Jaradat & Banikhaled, 2013). In nature, BI and UB are much similar to the TAM's ATU and ITU, respectively (Callum, 2011; Shachak et al., 2019).

In short, the UTAUT is the unification of the prior validated structural models for predicting user acceptance of ICT. It remains rather new in comparison with other models; nonetheless, it is able to account for 70 percent of the variance (adjusted R²) in usage intention (Venkatesh et al., 2003) and has been being used increasingly in studies assessing and estimating technology adoption (Callum, 2011; Taherdoost, 2017).

2.3 Modeling the technology acceptance model

The UTAUT has been employed in various fields to explore user belief, attitude and behaviors, and the research model has been adopted and modified to fit in the true situation and capture the complexity of the issues (Shachak et al., 2019; Tamilmani et al., 2021). The result is that some constructs can be added, removed, or adapted for a specific application in a certain situation. For example, Lescevic et al. (2013) adapted the UTAUT by excluding the indirect determinants of BI to explore market opportunities for FP7 CHOReOS products, Zuiderwijk et al. (2015) adopted the original moderating factor of voluntariness as a direct determinant of BI to predict user acceptance of open data technologies, or Berililana et al. (2017) added information system quality as a predictor of BI to estimate user intention to use e-government

services in Indonesia. Therefore, the hypothesized research model of this paper has been adapted from the UTAUT with the support of the aforementioned discussion and literature.

In more detail, the need-to-be-validated research model has eight factors, namely four direct determinants (PE, EE, SI, FC), two indirect determinants (SE, PANX), and two dependent factors (BI, UB). These factors are realized by 31 indicators which are adapted from the scale suggested by Venkatesh et al. (2003). Except for UB, which is realized by three indicators, the remaining constructs are measured by four each. These candidate indicators have been adapted to fit in the new research context to predict user acceptance of ICT tools. Also, the moderating variables have been removed from the original UTAUT because of the homogeneity of the sample in terms of age, gender, experience, and voluntariness. This adaptation of the hypothesized model is necessary in its specific application in a new context (Shachak et al., 2019, Tamilmani et al., 2021).

In short, the scale includes eight constructs, as was discussed above. The theorized relations among them help develop the hypotheses with the support of the prior research findings concerning user acceptance of ICT tools, and their correlation coefficients and regression weights will be examined to understand how they affect the student subjects' ICT use for learning English.

2.4. Hypothesis development

In the need-to-be-validated measurement scale, three direct determinants of BI are PE, EE and SI, two indirect determinants of BI are SE and PANX, and two predictors of UB are BI and FC. Based on the varying impacts of the determinants and the dependent factors and the correlations among them, seven hypotheses are stated as the following.

- H₁: BI is positively affected by PE.
- H₂: BI is positively affected by EE.
- H₃: BI is positively affected by SI
- H₄: BI is positively affected by PANX indirectly.
- H₅: BI is positively affected by SE indirectly.
- H₆: UB is positively affected by FC.
- H₇: UB is positively affected by BI.

After being tested via the correlation coefficients, the above-mentioned hypotheses are supposed to reveal the numeric relations between the determinants and the dependent constructs within the theorized measurement model.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design and approach

This is ethnography research with the engagement of six randomly-picked classes of Communicative English of a university in Ho Chi Minh City. Their majors were in the field of health care in the academic year of 2021 and were studying Communicative English 3, one of the five courses for non-English majors at this university. They had been studying through the blended model or the online model for more than a year before the research. When invited to answer the survey questionnaire, the participants in this research were taking part in the online courses on English due to the on-going Covid-19 pandemic. As required to study online, the student subjects had to equip themselves with their own devices such as smartphones, tablets or personal computers. All these gadgets must come with the Internet to get connected to their university's LMS to study English. Due to the mandated use of ICT tools in studying, the moderating variables of voluntariness and experience have not been included in the hypothesized model.

The student subjects were expected to provide information on their acceptance of or resistance to ICT tools for learning English at university. Before administering the online questionnaire to collect data via the Google Form, the authors introduced the purpose of the research work and explained the specific items to the respondents to ensure that they really got the point and provided reliable data after that. Finally, the data was computed, analyzed and discussed to estimate their ICT use for learning English through several analytical models.

3.2. Participants

Involved in the research work were 289 student subjects, among whom the females outnumbered the males and accounted for 82.4%. Besides, Figure 4 indicates that the number of sophomores providing the information for the research formed 79.6%, and the rest of the sample was composed of more senior year students. The seniority of the students at university also helped them understand that they had some experience in studying English at tertiary level education and familiarized themselves with studying online as those of other universities due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which had stricken the Vietnamese education system since early 2020. It could also be inferred that they had been using certain types of ICT tools for their studying need in general and for studying English in particular when the research was conducted there. Because of the homogenous age groups and the gender bias of the sample, the two moderating variables of age and gender were removed from the hypothesized research model.

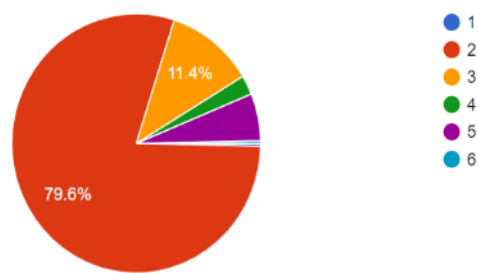


Figure 4. Student subjects' seniority at college

3.3. Instruments

The findings of this paper are solely based on the questionnaire delivered to a cohort of medical students in their second year or older. The questionnaire, which was adapted from the one suggested by Venkatesh et al. (2003) consists of two sections. The former one is contingent on seven questions designed for the students to check or to fill in, and it is designed to explore the student subjects' background information on ICT tool ownership and use. The latter one contains 31 question items whose responses are based on the five-point Likert scale for the students to click on. The questionnaire was sent to the students through the Google Form, and one big advantage of this mode of delivery is that when the question is marked as "required", the students have to answer all the marked question items before they can submit their responses successfully. This actually helps prevent missing data from occurring, and it is very easy for the analytical models to be performed later.

The questionnaire was written in English first, and then it was translated into Vietnamese in order that the students could fully understand every question item and provide their proper responses. After the data was downloaded, it was imported to the SPSS for further calculation.

3.4. Data analysis

After the data was imported into the SPSS, the data was run on some statistical analyses. The data analysis would go through several steps of statistical exploration to see the reliability of the measurement scale. First, the descriptive statistics helped understand the students' actual ownership and use of ICT tools in general. Next, the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) helped find out the factors that influence the students' use of ICT tools for learning English, and then the new model composed of the hypothesized factors was validated through the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Finally, the variance analysis was employed to calculate the correlations and test the hypothesized relations among the constructs of the hypothesized model. The analytical models above were expected to predict the determinants of the student subjects' use of ICT tools for learning English at tertiary education.

4. Data analysis and discussion

4.1 Answer to the first question

The first research question is what ICT tools the medical students actually own and use to study English online. The statistic figures indicate that 93.4% of the respondents claimed that they owned a certain type of gadget to study English online. The detail of the students' ICT use and ownership would be presented in the following charts.

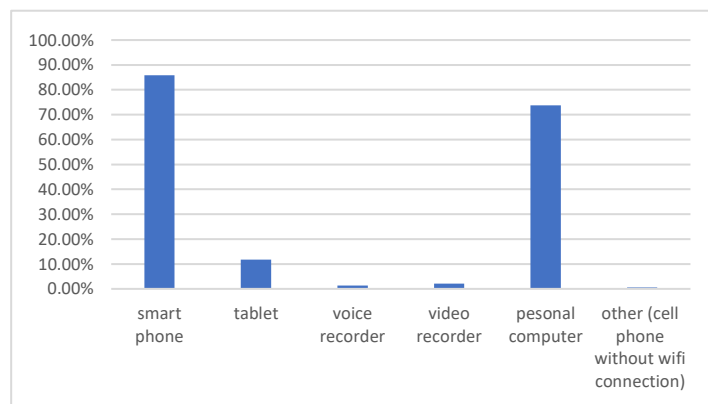


Figure 5. Student subjects' ownership of ICT tools

Figure 5 shows that 85.8% of the respondents possessed smartphones and 73.7% had personal computers. Then comes the number of tablets which forms 11.8 %, which is far lower than those of the smartphones and personal computers. In short, smartphones and personal computers are the two most popular gadgets that the student subjects own and use, and they are also very helpful ICT tools for them to study online now. This result stays concurrent with Pham and Vo's earlier findings (2021). For the remaining proportion of the respondents who indicated “no” to ICT ownership, they might have borrowed certain types of gadgets to serve their learning needs because e-learning or blended learning had been introduced for a year, and they could not have studied online without them.

Figure 6 indicates that the most favorite location and retrieval ICT tool for medical students is Google (89.6%). Next are the online dictionary and Youtube, which account for 48.8% and 41.5%, respectively. On the whole, the statistical figure explains that Google was most likely to be the tool with the highest percentage of use for getting information from the online resources to serve their study needs. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the students might have exploited the online dictionaries and online English courses for studying English. This helps infer that the students have already had some previous experience in using ICT for learning English online.

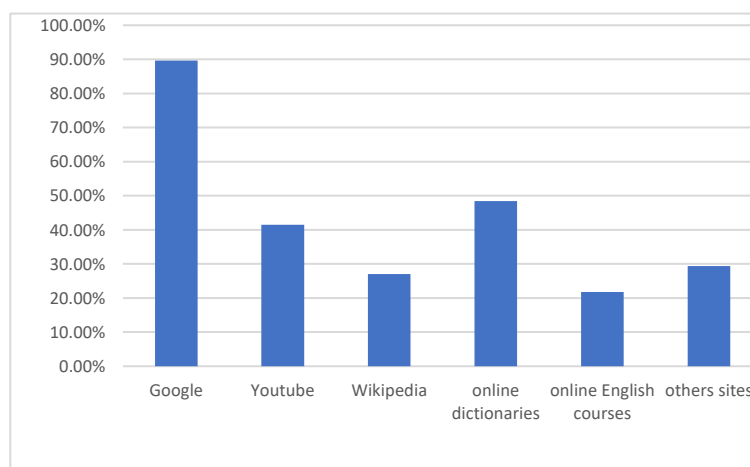


Figure 6. Student subjects' location and retrieval ICT tools

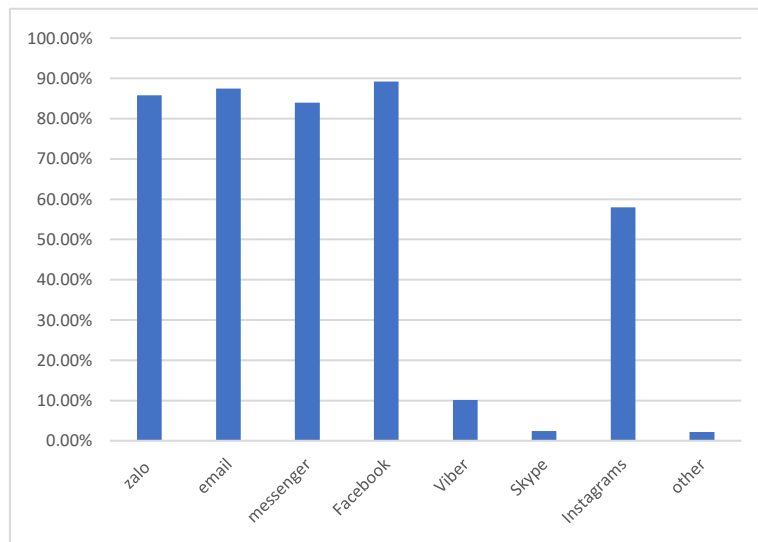


Figure 7. Student subjects' interaction ICT tools

Figure 7 illustrates that among the interaction ICT tools, Facebook (89.2%), Email (87.5%), Zalo (85.8%) and Messenger (84%) dominate the student subjects' use of ICT tools to communicate with other people. Then, the number of students using Instagrams comes forth with a percentage of 58%. Overall, the students were using Email, Messenger, Facebook, Zalo and Instagram, which are among the most popular ICT tools for social network communication in Vietnam. These tools are very good for them to share, discuss and seek entries with friends, teachers and other people. Furthermore, it is interesting to know that the number of students using Zalo is equivalent to that of those owning smartphones. This proves that interaction tools play an important role in their daily life.

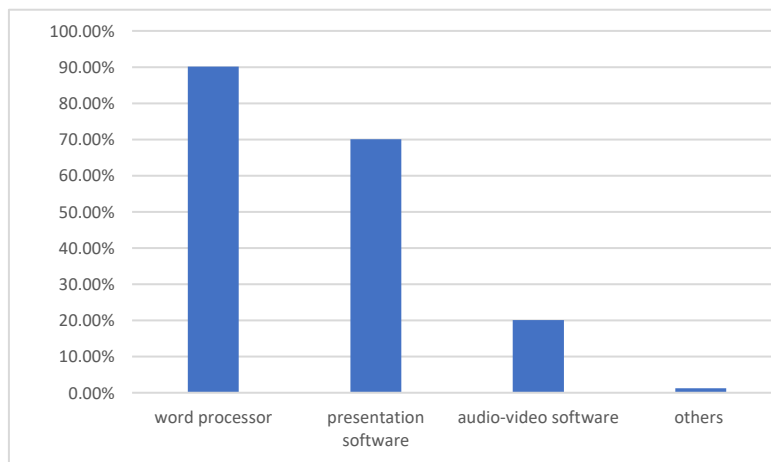


Figure 8. Student subjects' material creation ICT tools

Finally, Figure 8 shows the use of material creation ICT tools among the student subjects. The statistics demonstrate that the word processing software is the most preferred one, the percentage of which tops at 90.1%. Next is the presentation software with the use percentage

of 70.1%, and third is the audio-video software with 20.1%. In general, the students majoring in medication were accustomed to some popular software programs because they usually employed these tools to complete assignments, register for courses, make presentations, and interact with the lecturers over the Internet.

In conclusion, all the student subjects use technology to study English, and most of them (93.4%) possess certain types of ICT tools and have some previous experience in using these ICT tools for their learning needs.

4.2. Answer to the second research question

The collected data draws on 289 responses from the student subjects. Before carrying out the statistical calculation, the authors should really assess the reliability of the overall scale first. According to the reliability statistics, Cronbach's alpha index of the total scale reaches .955, which is very good for further exploration. However, when screening the factor loading of each variable, the authors found that PANX1, PANX2, PANX3 and PANX4 receive the corrected item-total correlations of .284, .150, .259 and .259 respectively, which are below the acceptable level of .30 (Hair et al., 2010); therefore, these independent variables will be dropped from the hypothesized scale.

Table 2. Reliability of the scale

	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha	Valid cases	Excluded cases
EE	4	.881	289	0
SE	4	.961	289	0
SI	4	.928	289	0
PE	4	.879	289	0
FC	4	.920	289	0
BI	4	.928	289	0
UB	3	.933	289	0
Total Scale	27	.971	289	0

Then, the remaining variables went through the test of reliability again, and it can be seen in Table 2 that the reliability indexes of each component and the overall scale are much higher than the acceptable level of over .60 (Hair et al., 2010), indicating that the EFA could be performed.

The result of the EFA shows that the Kaier-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy reaches .954, which is far higher than the very good level of .90, and Bartlett’s test of sphericity is far lower the acceptable level of below .05 (Hair et al., 2010), indicating that the data is fit for the EFA to run the component reduction. After the first extraction of the principal components through the EFA, the total variance explains that the new model will be composed of four factors when the initial Eigenvalue total marks at 1.080, and the cumulative extraction sums of squared loadings form 75.789%. In other words, eight constructs of the hypothesized research model have been reduced to four by now.

Table 3 shows that although there are not any blends across the constructs, all construct variables have been grouped into four factors. Therefore, three out of them will have to be conceptualized again and relabeled.

The first factor includes SE and EE; thus, its new name should be ICT Proficiency (IP), which refers to the level of individual capability to use ICT free of effort. The grouping of SE and EE might have come from the fact that the student subjects have familiarized themselves with ICT use for online learning; they are very confident in ICT use and can use ICT tools free of effort. This leads to the fact SE and EE share a high proportion of covariance in common, and they have been statistically computed as one construct only. In the same way, the second new factor consists of SI and PE, and it should be renamed External Influence (EI). This might also have resulted from the truth that they have been utilizing ICT tools for studying for years, forming their belief that ICT tools are useful for them to study online and they use these tools because the people around them, namely the teacher, course administrators, parents and/or friends, expect them to use ICT tools to study. This influence has caused them to feel a close relation between PE and SI, and they are statistically measured by one-factor loading. Then, a similar case is true to the last new factor, which is composed of BI and UB. This new factor should be named Actual Use (AU). This convergence of the factor loadings is not uncommon in the TAM

Table 3. Rotated component matrix

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
EE2	.806			
SE3	.794			
SE1	.776			
EE4	.738			
EE3	.712			
SE4	.710			
SE2	.688			
EE1	.676			
PE2		.806		
PE1		.767		
SI1		.731		
SI4		.722		
PE3		.721		
SI3		.689		
PE4		.660		
SI2		.633		
UB1			.832	
UB3			.792	
UB2			.786	
BI4			.729	
BI2			.715	
BI1			.666	
BI3			.593	
FC2				.775
FC1				.729
FC3				.706
FC4				.622

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
 a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

and the UTAUT when the sample has experience using ICT tools, which blurs the distinction between ATU and ITU (Shachak et al., 2019). To put it another way, the experience in ICT use has led their intention to use ICT tools to move closer to behavioral use.

In short, the findings of the EFA explain that the factors that affect the students' acceptance of ICT use for learning English include IP, EI and FC. The exclusion of PANX might have come from the explanation that the students do not find ICT tools difficult anymore because they show very good skills at using ICT tools through FC; thus, PANX does not play a role in influencing the students' ICT use in learning English online. It is also worth noting that SE is parallel to SI, EE and PE, indicating that it is more direct than indirect to determine BI.

To examine the relations among all the constructs of the newly formed research model more clearly and to confirm the model fit, the structural equation model (SEM) is employed. The model fit can be explained in the Chi-square fit index divided by the degree of freedom (Chi-square/df), the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Hair et al., 2010).

Figure 9 illustrates that the newly validated model comes with some good indexes of the model fit. In fact, the indexes of CFI and TLI are higher than the good fit index of above .90, and Chi-square/df, GFI and RMSEA indexes are 3.214, .790, .88, respectively, all of which meet the adequate fit indexes of the scale measure. More particularly, Chi-square/df is 3.214, falling in the interval of the adequate fit index of between 2.0 and 5.0 (Hair et al., 2010). Then, the GFI index is .790, which is a little lower than the good fit index of .80, but it still falls in the adequate fit of the measurement. Finally, the RMSEA index is .088, which is actually in the adequate fit index of between .80 and .90 (Hair et al., 2010). On the whole, all the indexes in Figure 9 confirm that the newly validated model is fit for measurement.

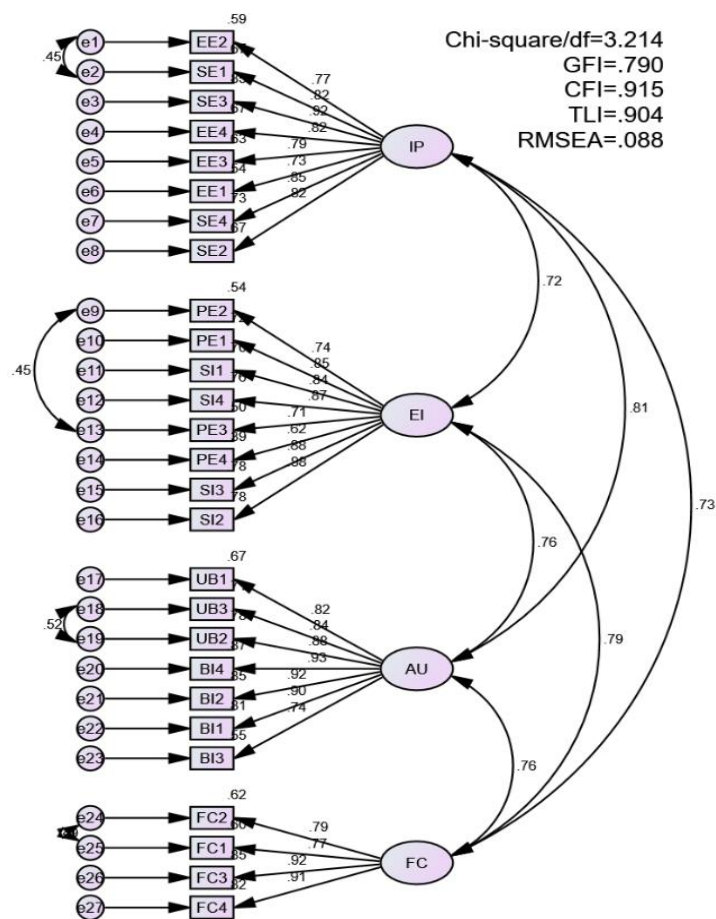


Figure 9. The student subjects' ICT use explained through the SEM

Besides, the regression weight paths bear great correlations among the constructs of the new model. This can help explain the linear relationships between the determinants and the dependent factors.

In conclusion, the EFA and the CFA have helped explore the factors that affect the student subjects' use of ICT for learning English online. Except for PANX, which has failed to function as a direct determinant, the rest of the candidate determinants have been the strong predictors of the student subjects' use of ICT tools in the newly validated model.

4.3. Answer to the third research question

Table 4 shows the correlation coefficients among the constructs of the hypothesized scale. Most of the relations bear the p-value, which is statistically significant at the .01 level (2-tailed) and shows the positive correlations among them. Those pairs of factors that hold the positive correlations entail the fact that the change of one factor will naturally lead to the change of the other. For example, SI and BI are positively correlated; if SI increases, it will lead BI to increase eventually.

It is, however, noteworthy that PANX is uncorrelated to nearly all the other factors because its p-value is much higher than the acceptable level of below .05. Except for its significant p-value at below .01 and the correlation coefficient of .779 in relation to PE, these statistical figures illustrate that PANX and PE are positively correlated, indicating that the change of PANX will most likely entail the change of PE in a positive way. Being correlated to PE but uncorrelated to the other direct determinants of SI, EE, SE, and FC, PANX is not treated as the indirect determinant of BI, and H₄ is negated as well. For the rest of the hypotheses, H₁, H₂, H₃, H₅, H₆

Table 4. Covariance correlations

		EE	SE	PANX	SI	PE	BI	FC	UB
EE	Pearson Correlation	1	.849**	-.028	.670**	.505**	.730**	.615**	.652**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.637	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	2223.522	1877.173	-95.221	1564.003	1200.294	1763.983	1482.464	1193.578
	Covariance	7.721	6.518	-.331	5.431	4.168	6.125	5.147	4.144
	N	289	289	289	289	289	289	289	289
SE	Pearson Correlation	.849**	1	.027	.658**	.550**	.726**	.648**	.679**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.650	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	1877.173	2199.792	91.066	1527.796	1300.647	1746.021	1552.644	1234.907
	Covariance	6.518	7.638	.316	5.305	4.516	6.063	5.391	4.288
	N	289	289	289	289	289	289	289	289
PANX	Pearson Correlation	-.028	.027	1	.115	.271**	.004	.142	.010
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.637	.650		.052	.000	.941	.016	.861
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	-95.221	91.066	5234.796	410.581	989.412	16.093	523.896	29.080
	Covariance	-.331	.316	18.176	1.426	3.435	.056	1.819	.101
	N	289	289	289	289	289	289	289	289
SI	Pearson Correlation	.670**	.658**	.115	1	.779**	.737**	.720**	.631**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.052		.000	.000	.000	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	1564.003	1527.796	410.581	2452.616	1945.353	1871.920	1820.533	1211.858
	Covariance	5.431	5.305	1.426	8.516	6.755	6.500	6.321	4.208
	N	289	289	289	289	289	289	289	289
PE	Pearson Correlation	.505**	.550**	.271**	.779**	1	.637**	.691**	.521**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	1200.294	1300.647	989.412	1945.353	2544.000	1646.235	1779.294	1018.941
	Covariance	4.168	4.516	3.435	6.755	8.833	5.716	6.178	3.538
	N	289	289	289	289	289	289	289	289
BI	Pearson Correlation	.730**	.726**	.004	.737**	.637**	1	.701**	.851**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.941	.000	.000		.000	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	1763.983	1746.021	16.093	1871.920	1646.235	2627.398	1836.336	1692.709
	Covariance	6.125	6.063	.056	6.500	5.716	9.123	6.376	5.877
	N	289	289	289	289	289	289	289	289
FC	Pearson Correlation	.615**	.648**	.142	.720**	.691**	.701**	1	.606**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.016	.000	.000	.000		.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	1482.464	1552.644	523.896	1820.533	1779.294	1836.336	2609.405	1201.990
	Covariance	5.147	5.391	1.819	6.321	6.178	6.376	9.060	4.174
	N	289	289	289	289	289	289	289	289
UB	Pearson Correlation	.652**	.679**	.010	.631**	.521**	.851**	.606**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.861	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	1193.578	1234.907	29.080	1211.858	1018.941	1692.709	1201.990	1505.308
	Covariance	4.144	4.288	.101	4.208	3.538	5.877	4.174	5.227
	N	289	289	289	289	289	289	289	289

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

and H₇ are well supported. Then, the validated correlations claim that the students' behavioral intention to use of ICT tools are directly influenced by SI, EE, SE and PE, among which SI is the most influential. Furthermore, the tested hypotheses reveal that the students' behavioral use of ICT tools are impacted by BI and FC, the former of which is the stronger predictor.

In conclusion, the EFA, the CFA and the tested hypotheses help forecast and quantitatively estimate the students' use of ICT for learning English. Most of the factors of the validated measurement model are positively correlated, and their regression weight paths help predict the causal relations between the determinants and the dependent factors.

4.4. Discussions

After much computation upon the analytic models, this research paper has arrived at the following findings.

The students have sufficient facilitating conditions to own ICT tools and much experience in using them. They are using modern electronic gadgets such as smartphones (85.8%), tablets (11.8%), and personal computers (73.7%) to serve their learning needs. They also exploit trendy social network apps for communication and interaction such as Email (87.5%), Zalo (85.8%), Facebook (89.2%), and Messenger (84%), and they are good at office software such as word processing (90.1%) or presentation (70.1%); as a result, medical students are ready for learning English with the high degree of ICT incorporation, namely *online learning*, *hybrid learning* or *blended learning*, at tertiary level.

The grouping of some constructs of the validated model comes from the fact that they share a high proportion of factor loadings with each other. More specifically, EE is paired with SE to make IP, indicating that ease to use and self-efficacy should go together to influence user attitude; accordingly, the student's attitude towards ICT tools will most likely change positively when they find these tools easy to use and feel capable of using them at the same time. In addition, the blend of PE and SI to establish EI indicates that when the students find ICT tools motivating in the class and simultaneously have their ICT use recognized by those around them, they will more probably take a positive attitude towards acceptance of ICT tools. Finally, the merger of BI and UB as the dependent factor helps predict that the students find these two constructs very conceptually close; hence, when having a positive attitude towards ICT use, they will most likely adopt ICT tools for learning.

Most of the hypotheses stated in Section 2.3 have been supported, and the linear relations among the determinants and the dependent factors have been proven. BI and FC are the strong predictors of the student subjects' use of ICT tools; in a similar way, SI, EE, SE and PE are the direct determinants of BI. In other words, if students are expected to increase their use of ICT tools for learning English, they should really be provided with good facilitating conditions and hold a positive attitude towards ICT use. If wanting their attitude towards ICT use to change positively, they should find ICT tools easy to use and useful for their studying needs, find themselves confident in ICT use, and believe that other people around them recognize their effort.

SE has been a direct determinant of BI as it is proven to be a parallel factor to PE, EE, and SI, meaning that if the students feel confident in using ICT tools, they will more likely change their attitude towards adoption of these tools. However, PANX has been excluded in the research model right after the EFA, indicating that it plays a very little role in affecting the students' acceptance of ICT tools for learning English. This result has been found in earlier studies (Callum, 2011; Venkatesh et al., 2003). The exclusion of PANX might have come from the fact that the student subjects are very good at ICT and do not find ICT tools difficult to use after they have been studying online for some time. This finding is consistent with that of Tran and Nguyen (2021) when they noticed a decrease in students' difficulties regarding cognitive, emotional, and socio-cultural aspects after the intervention.

In short, the computation has successfully explained the correlations among the eight candidate constructs of the hypothesized measurement model. Understanding the variance correlations among the constructs, the teacher, the course administrator, and/or parents will be able to predict the students' use of ICT more accurately and find the right determinant(s) to increase if they want to increase the affected factor in the validated model.

5. Conclusion and implications

5.1. Conclusion

The paper successfully applied the UTAUT to predict the factors that affect medical students' use of ICT tools for studying English in online courses. The validated measurement model has helped explain the intricate relations among the determinants and the dependent constructs. The EFA has simplified the hypothesized model via reducing an indirect determinant and grouping some factors that bear high internal validity. Then, the validated measure scale indicates that UB is influenced by BI and FC, while BI is affected by EI and IP. After that, the CFA examines the model fit indexes to confirm that the validated model can generate consistent results.

Although the research has arrived at some achievements, the research was conducted on the cohort of the students who are homogenous in their age groups, experience, and voluntariness, and the females outnumber the males by four times; as a result, further studies in the future should avoid those limitations and target the larger sample size of different age groups and with more varying levels of experience and voluntariness in ICT use.

5.2. Implications

The findings of this research paper clearly show the complex relations among the constructs of the validated model. Depending on the statistical calculation, the authors of this paper would like to put some major implications forwards as below.

First, FC and BI are influential on UB, indicating that the student's behavioral use of ICT tools is affected by the facilitating condition and their attitude towards ICT use for learning. Accordingly, if teachers, course administrators and/or parents want to increase the students' use of ICT for learning English, they should find ways to change their students' attitude towards

ICT use positively and provide good assistance and resources for them to use ICT tools. When the students find ICT tools useful and interesting to use in the class and get good access to ICT tools and technical support, they will most probably use these tools for learning English.

Second, BI is affected by EI and IP, meaning that if teachers, course administrators and/or parents wish to change their students' attitude towards ICT use positively, they should really help them find ICT tools easy, rewarding and motivating to use, feel confident to use them successfully and consider them useful for their studying. In other words, when the students comprehend the value-adding benefits of using ICI, they will be more probably to use ICT tools for studying (Shachak et al., 2019).

Third, the exclusion of PANX from the validated model indicates that this construct does not have much influence on the students' use of ICT. As a result of that, if teachers, course administrators and/or parents expect to enhance the students' positive behavior towards ICT use, they should choose user-friendly ICT tools for students to use instead of requesting them to deploy a complex system and simultaneously provide sufficient and timely assistance (if any) for them. In short, the students are more likely to use ICT tools for studying when they find the ICT tools free of effort.

Finally, SE is a direct determinant of BI. This means that when the students judge their own capabilities of ICT use and feel confident about the results, they will most likely accept ICT use for studying. Therefore, if teachers, course administrators and/or parents hope to increase the students' positive attitude towards ICT use for learning, one of their jobs is that they should help their students form their ICT self-efficacy first. Their self-efficacy will give them confidence in deploying ICT tools successfully.

On the whole, students' acceptance of ICT is intricately influenced by several constructs as described in the validated measurement model. The job of the teachers, course administrators, parents and/or students themselves is to find out which factor is affected by which one(s) in order that they can timely find the proper predictor(s) to stimulate or increase. Then, the linear relation will guarantee the positive change of its dependent factor naturally.

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Biodata

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Part 2: STUDY QUESTIONS

Please blacken the following ratings below, indicating 1 (absolutely disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree) and 5 (absolutely agree).

Factors	Variables	Scale				
		1	2	3	4	5
EE	EE1. I can use ICT.	1	2	3	4	5
	EE2. My interaction with ICT would be clear and understandable.	1	2	3	4	5
	EE3. Learning to use ICT is easy for me.	1	2	3	4	5
	EE4. It would be easy for me to become skilled at ICT.	1	2	3	4	5
SE	SE1: I could complete a task via using ICT tools	1	2	3	4	5
	SE2: I could use ICT tools to complete my course.	1	2	3	4	5
	SE3: I could address trouble with ICT tools.	1	2	3	4	5
	SE4: I could study well with the help of ICT.	1	2	3	4	5
PANX	PANX1. I feel apprehensive about using ICT	1	2	3	4	5
	PANX2: It scares me to think that I could lose a lot of information using ICT.	1	2	3	4	5
	PANX3: I hesitate to use ICT for fear of making serious mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5
	PANX4: ICT is somewhat intimidating to me.	1	2	3	4	5
SI	SI1. Those important to me think that I should know to use ICT.	1	2	3	4	5
	SI2. Those influencing me think that I should use the system.	1	2	3	4	5
	SI3. The university encourages me to use ICT for studying.	1	2	3	4	5
	SI4. The university supports students' use of ICT.	1	2	3	4	5
PE	PE1. I am strongly motivated by the recognition from peers.	1	2	3	4	5
	PE2. Using ICT is helpful for my study.	1	2	3	4	5
	PE3. ICT helps me complete tasks more quickly.	1	2	3	4	5
	PE4. ICT helps me study.	1	2	3	4	5
FC	FC1. I have the resources necessary to use ICT.	1	2	3	4	5
	FC2. I have the knowledge necessary to use ICT.	1	2	3	4	5
	FC3. ICT is compatible with my learning needs.	1	2	3	4	5
	FC4. Technical assistance is always available.	1	2	3	4	5
BI	BI1. It is a good idea to use ICT to study English.	1	2	3	4	5
	BI2. ICT makes studying English more interesting.	1	2	3	4	5
	BI3. I expect to experience studying English with ICT.	1	2	3	4	5
	BI4. I like using ICT for learning.	1	2	3	4	5
UB	UB1. I will use ICT in my daily life.	1	2	3	4	5
	UB2. I will use ICT in studying English.	1	2	3	4	5
	UB3. I plan to use ICT in studying.	1	2	3	4	5

End of the survey

Perceptions of EFL tertiary students towards the correlation between e-learning and learning engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

It is true that education is one of the fields affected by the spread of COVID-19. Many countries, including Vietnam, have implemented online learning at a national scale to every level of education to adapt to the circumstance. In teaching English at university, the implementation's efficacy remains debatable since it may intensify the challenges that are already problematic in traditional English schooling. Among those arduous problems, student engagement is the focus of this qualitative study. Specifically, the paper examines how Vietnamese non-English major undergraduates perceive the influence of e-learning on their engagement in studying the language. Regarding the literature, online learning with its benefits and shortcomings is firstly reviewed, which is followed by the scrutiny of student engagement in general and in English learning. The review is then concluded by inspecting several relevant studies.

A focus group interview is applied to collect data, which is also considered a gap of this study since the groups of interviewees only come from one university in Ho Chi Minh city. The findings are expected to provide more insights into the degree of student engagement in English online learning in higher education, thus calling for more effort to be exerted in seeking appropriate strategies to promote Vietnamese EFL graduates' engagement in their e-learning.

Keywords:

perceptions, EFL, tertiary, e-learning, learning engagement, COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

Since the arrival of COVID-19, the Ministry Of Education And Training (MOET) in Vietnam has been applying numerous strategies to prevent the virus spread while sustaining the teaching and learning of every education system. Regarding the situation of higher education in Vietnam, MOET's most recent measure is to force a halt in all on-campus teaching activities (Huong, 2020). All classes, regardless of their levels, are to be delivered online with the support of many applications. At the Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry (HUPI), every online

educational activity has been conducted via Zoom even since the beginning of 2020. Regarding the context of teaching English online at the institution, every student joins a Zoom class that lasts two hours and fifteen minutes once a week. Two teachers, a Vietnamese and a foreigner, are in charge of each class on alternating weeks.

Up until now, there have been many opinions from the English teachers at HUFU related to the efficacy of this adaptation. Among those common concerns is the doubt about low student engagement in learning the language via the Internet. This, however, has already been the center of attention in a traditional EFL setting prior to the COVID-19 outbreak (Schmidt, 2001; Gass, 2003; Philp & Duchesne, 2016). Sinatra et al (2015) even indicate the notion as the main determiner of successful learning. As for how online learning can affect student engagement, this relationship is confirmed in numerous studies carried out in similar contexts to the one in Vietnam (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Famularsih, 2020; Gao & Zhang, 2020). Unfortunately, there appears to be a scarcity of in-depth researches on how Vietnamese EFL undergraduates' engagement can be affected due to e-learning, which may drive any stakeholders' attention away from where it should be and thus contributes to the prolonged inefficiency in English education at tertiary level in Vietnam.

The significance of engagement in learners' improvement in English, the effects of e-learning on it, and how little has been done to examine this relationship in the EFL context at higher education in Vietnam are the major drivers of this study.

Literature review

A. Online learning

1. Definitions and classifications

E-learning can be defined in various ways by different researchers. Sutherland (1999) refers to this concept as learning which takes place in "invisible classrooms," while the term is understood as learning being made possible due to electronic aid (Abbad et al., 2009). In their understanding, Liu and Wang (2009) suggest that e-learning relates significantly to the vast role of the Internet where resources or knowledge is shared worldwide, which is a solution to the geographical and timing issues.

In an attempt to classify the types of online learning, Algahtani (2011) categorizes it into computer-based and internet-based e-learning. While the former relates strictly to any computer hardware or software that supports learning interactively. The latter taps into the power of the virtual world to facilitate learning regardless of places or time. Under this second form are the two modes of learning interaction. The first is "synchronous," referring to the instantaneous communication between teachers and students thanks to many online tools. The second is "asynchronous," which also enables a teacher-learner online interaction, but such discussions do not take place at one specific point in time (Algahtani, 2011).

2. Online learning in tertiary education

As for e-learning in higher education, various scholars are emphatic about the growing significance this way of acquiring knowledge has in universities (Dublin, 2003; Maeroff, 2004; Love & Fry, 2006). There are several ways in which online learning can benefit higher education, while its shortcomings are also worth mentioning. The following briefly summarizes how this method is perceived by both tertiary educators and students (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015; Hulse, 2021; Fedynich et al., 2015; Pham & Tran, 2020; Song et al., 2004; Laili & Nashir, 2021). There are several rationales for choosing these papers. Firstly, they share a common objective to explore the perceptions of tertiary students and lecturers towards e-learning. In addition, despite being done in various contexts, the papers manage to deliver very similar results. Specifically, factors that can facilitate and impede the e-learning experience will be reviewed. These factors, however, are not separate elements but are rather correlated with each other to influence undergraduates' viewpoints of their online learning.

a) Technological aspects

It is concluded by all these works that e-learning benefits undergraduates with its instantaneous accessibility. In other words, students can study online without arriving at their institutions. However, the study by Laili and Nashir (2021) suggests that living in remote areas of a country can have a negative impact on students' e-learning since such places do not often have a stable Internet connection. Moreover, students who are "stuttering in using technology" may not prefer learning online (Laili & Nashir, 2021, p. 691). The second aspect is aligned with the work of Song et al. (2004) and Pham and Tran (2020). Their findings reveal that students will be more welcome to study online when they have familiarized themselves with the use of technological tools or platforms.

b) Interactions

The students in these studies are satisfied with online learning when they have positive interaction experiences with their classmates and instructors. Fedynich et al. (2015) state their student participants are not content with virtual learning if their teachers give inadequate feedback. Likewise, "lack of community" is listed as one of the unsatisfactory factors (Song et al., 2004, p. 66). The interviewees in this study also suggest the situation can be improved with the presence of face-to-face interactive activities built by teachers. Similar results are found in Pham and Tran (2020) and Laili and Nashir (2021). These two recent studies discover that communication failures cause college students to have less interest in learning online. They argue such breakdowns occur due to several reasons, including poor connection, distractions, insufficient instructions from teachers.

c) Motivation and engagement

The third contributor is motivation (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015; Song et al., 2004; Fedynich et al., 2015; Hulse, 2021; Laili & Nashir, 2021). In general, the participants agree they need to be highly motivated to succeed in studying online. This can be achieved if the Internet connection

remains undisrupted, the high quality of interactions is guaranteed, and effective teacher support must be constantly provided. Otherwise, students will feel "bored and unmotivated" thus become less engaged with e-learning (Hulse, 2021, p. 34).

The above arguably demonstrates that e-learning in higher education is a complex matter despite its true potentials. Among the reviewed influencing factors, the last one about motivation and engagement is directly linked with this paper's focus. It is suggested that engagement plays a key role in pushing students to learn, and it can be influenced by a range of factors (Christenson et al., 2012). The importance of engagement is also demonstrated in numerous attempts from schools or institutions in altering their educating environment as well as programs with an intention to raise student engagement, which will lead to positive outcomes such as improved academic performance or reduced dropouts (Fredricks et al., 2004). Nevertheless, with reference to the English education realm, how to make learners engaged in learning this language is already a challenging task that attracts enormous research effort (Hiver et al., 2021; Philp & Duchesne, 2016; Svalberg, 2009). This matter is made even more complicated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when all learning activities must be organized online. The paper now moves on to examine the literature relevant to student engagement in EFL and the current situation of this notion in e-learning contexts.

B. Student engagement in EFL and online learning

1. Definitions

It is agreed among many practitioners that student engagement is a multifaceted concept (Appleton et al., 2006; Finn, 1989; F. Newmann et al., 1992). According to Mahdikhani and Rezaei (2015), the concept can be generally understood as students being motivated to take actions to learn. The writers explain further that these actions contain “emotions, attention, goals, and other psychological processes along with persistent and effortful behavior“ (Mahdikhani & Rezaei, 2015, p. 110). This is identical to Fredricks et al. (2004) with their effort to categorize learning engagement into different types, which are examined below.

2. Classifications

a) Behavioral engagement

This dimension of engagement is said to have a pivotal impact on a student's academic performance (Fredricks et al., 2004). In their summary, the authors point out three signs to identify behaviorally engaged students. The first sign is whether students obey their school's obligations or norms such as being punctual, not causing trouble while studying, etc. The second sign is more academic-related. An engaged student participates intensely in their learning by focusing, persevering, dedicating to any learning activities. The last sign of behavioral engagement is when students engage themselves in non-academic activities held by their school. In learning a foreign language, behavioral engagement is shown when learners willingly join a conversation by facilitating and maintaining interactions in the target language irrespective of any forms of support (Philp & Duchesne, 2016).

b) Cognitive Engagement

A student is engaging cognitively when there is an existence of “psychological investment in learning” (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 63). Wehlage et al. (1989) state that students will become strategic learners by applying various ways in order to “comprehend and master knowledge or skills” (p. 17). In foreign language acquisition, students may demonstrate their cognitive engagement in many ways (Svalberg, 2009). Firstly, when working in pairs and provided that teacher support is given implicitly, students have a tendency to focus solely on their discussion to perform the given task. Secondly, recognizing that they do not possess a specific grammar point and asking for support from teachers is also an indicator of cognitively engaged language learners. Furthermore, Philp and Duchesne (2016) argue that non-verbal expressions, including body language or facial expressions, can also be considered a form of cognitive engagement.

c) Emotional engagement

When students react in a specific context by showing their feelings, they are affectively engaged (Fredricks et al., 2004). It can be how students feel about their connection with their schools (Yazzie-Mintz, 2009). Additionally, students may have positive or negative feelings towards a given task, their classmates, or teachers (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). In the context of language learning, emotionally engaged or disengaged students will express their emotions towards designed activities whose objectives are to help them practice the language (Hiver et al., 2021).

d) Social engagement

This dimension is usually found in studies about engagement in foreign language learning for its distinctive nature (Svalberg, 2009; Philp & Duchesne, 2016). In particular, social engagement refers to whether one will make an effort to interact with others. A language learner is considered socially engaged when they pay attention and respond to what is being communicated (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). In her work, Svalberg (2009) points out that a learner with great social engagement will be ready to interact and strive to keep their conversation going regardless of facing difficulties in terms of linguistic competence.

3. The correlation among the dimensions of student engagement

In their review of engagement in language learning, Hiver et al. (2021) propose that emotional engagement can influence the other dimensions since it can affect how students behave or perceive their language learning experience, thus determining the degree to which they participate in learning. This can be traced back to Fredricks et al. (2004). Specifically, the three types of learning engagement are "dynamically interrelated" within a learner in a real-life context (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 61). Svalberg (2009) also shares a similar view by arguing the dimensions can "encroach on each other" (p. 255). For instance, a student's contextual emotional state can impact their use of learning strategies related to cognitive engagement. Another example by Svalberg (2009) is that feeling we can be in control of a conversation can raise our readiness to interact with others.

4. Factors affecting the dimensions

So far in this paper, the importance of student engagement from a theoretical perspective has been demonstrated through its various definitions, classifications, and multidimensional nature. However, it is inadequate if the practicality of understanding the notion is not taken into account. Therefore, this part is dedicated to examining both positive and negative influences of learning engagement. Since this study takes place in an EFL context, the focus will be on what affects engagement in learning a foreign language.

Firstly, Svalberg (2009) argue that learning environment such as noise or temperature can affect how strategic students can be in learning. Secondly, how a learning task is designed has a significant role in “facilitating” or “impeding” a student’s cognitive engagement (Svalberg, 2009, p. 255). She suggests a task should be designed in a way it can be matched with students’ different levels and learning styles. In addition, a task should aim at motivating students trivially by being purposeful, attainable, but competitive. Newmann (1992) also points out the needed characteristics of an ideal learning task, some of which are overlapped with Svalberg’s (2009). Specifically, a task must be enjoyable, authenticated, and provide students with opportunities for interactions, self-reflection of their academic performance. Additionally, topics with high relevance and interest are beneficial in helping language learners become more emotionally engaged (Svalberg, 2009). Thirdly, the role of a teacher is highly significant in impacting different dimensions of student engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). They argue that students’ adherence to school or classroom rules when they receive great teacher support is a sign of increased behavioral engagement. Moreover, emotional engagement is also affected due to the fact that students’ attitude becomes more positive when teachers are being closed to them (Fredricks et al., 2004). This connection is reported by Svalberg (2009) when she claims such social relationships can influence language students to become more socially engaged by being more ready to interact with their classmates to fulfill a given task.

Another crucial point related to teacher support is made by Fredricks et al. (2004). They propose that teachers can be at risk of dampening either social, cognitive, or emotional engagement if they cannot manage to design activities that foster academic and social outcomes since these outcomes can help students process appropriate learning approaches and increase their sense of belonging. This is also found in Svalberg’s argument, which claims teachers must be precisely consistent in instructing students to perform a task (Svalberg, 2009).

C. Studies about tertiary student engagement in learning English online during the pandemic

The last part of the literature review examines four studies whose focus is on how English learning engagement at higher education is perceived in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic and the causal factors behind it. These studies are selected as they share several similarities. First of all, they all have an identical purpose. Secondly, the participants from each study are all undergraduates who learn English merely as a subject. Most importantly, they are all conducted during the pandemic where e-learning at universities becomes mandatory where both teachers and students are, to a certain degree, forced to adapt to study online.

The first study by Khattala Asma and Houichi Asma (2021) was conducted in Algeria to investigate 29 teachers' and 46 students' points of view about e-learning and how it can be fostered. In addition, online questionnaires and interviews are used to collect data. Regarding the findings, the student participants generally demonstrate a poor level of engagement in learning English online due to a range of causes. Specifically, they are emotionally disengaged with this learning type due to technical problems, including them being inadequately equipped with a stable connection, modern devices, or the necessary skills to use them. Moreover, they also admit to lacking the essential strategies to study online efficiently, which explains their low cognitive engagement. Finally, these participants' social engagement also suffers. They claim that Algerian students have been "isolated" from communicating with their teachers and classmates since most of their virtual interactions are with their screens or online documents.

The second study was done in Indonesia by Yunik Susanti to analyze her students' engagement in learning English online (2020). In this qualitative research, 120 students from one university complete a closed-ended questionnaire, and the results are slightly different from the first research. The participants hold their neutral opinion about how cognitively engaged they are. Despite not having any major difficulties in understanding their EFL teachers, not all of them manage to learn effectively by answering their teachers' questions or expressing their points of view about their lessons. As for their degree of emotional engagement, more than 50% of the participants choose silence as a response to their teacher's request for interaction out of fear that they may make mistakes. However, their level of interest in an online EFL class remains the same as when they study offline. Behavioral engagement is the only dimension that is rated completely positive. Specifically, most of the participants claim to be responsible for their e-learning by logging in and submitting their assigned work on time, as well as remaining active during their lessons.

A mixture of positive and negative undergraduates' perceptions towards engagement in learning English via the Internet is captured in the next paper, which is also carried out in Indonesia (Laili & Nashir, 2021). The participants are 103 students majoring in medical-related fields, and their contributions were collected through questionnaires and interviews via Google Form and Zoom. The results show that the respondents tend to have great behavioral engagement. Although the majority of them admit poor Internet connection and expensive Internet quota are evident obstacles in learning English online, they mostly claim to have a "high spirit" in studying the language by trying to reach a place with better connection or submitting their assignments online to avoid violating the course rules (Laili & Nashir, 2021, p. 693). However, this is not the case for the learners' cognitive, emotional and social engagement, which influence each other. In particular, more than two-thirds of the participants experienced communication breakdowns in their online English class due to bad connections and ineffective teaching and learning methods. This and the fact they must look at their device's screen for too long has led to their boredom in e-learning, which also results in most of them lacking the enthusiasm to practice speaking English online.

The last study also examines the engagement of English students in higher education in

Indonesia (Sari Famularsih, 2020). In addition to a questionnaire and Zoom interviews, the study also applies observation as its third tool to collect data from 165 undergraduates at Teknokrat Indonesia University. The findings from this study are more positive than the other two Indonesian investigations. Firstly, the participants state they enjoy participating in several online learning activities, which indicates they are emotionally engaged. Their positive social engagement is also recorded since most of them are willing to engage in online interactive tasks and apply them to their real life. Most significantly, these affectively and socially engaged students are driven to study English online since they can use the learning materials very efficiently, which even motivates them to seek different “learning ways to make the course interesting to them” (p. 354). In other words, these students are cognitively engaged. This is shown even more clearly through online observation. Specifically, the students take on an active role to learn from raising questions, replying to their peers' answers, asking for teacher support, and seeking extra sources to complete their online tasks.

In summary, the above studies can be argued to precisely reflect the complex nature of student engagement: its contextual dependence. While one engagement dimension may strongly emerge in one context, the same dimension is reported to be poorly low in another. This aligns with Janosz (2012), arguing that contextual factors should receive the utmost attention to comprehend learning engagement truly.

Research Questions

The paper expects to fulfill its purpose by aiming to answer the following research questions:

1. How do undergraduates at HUFU think about their engagement in studying English virtually due to the pandemic?
2. What are the factors that influence their engagement?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

This study takes place in the Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry (HUFU), and the participants are four focus groups of students from different majors but English. As a non-English major student at this college, one needs to complete four English courses, including Elementary English, English 1, English 2, and English 3. During the COVID-19 outbreak, all their English classes were done online via the application called Zoom. In addition, an online English class at HUFU lasts the same length as an offline class, which is two hours and fifteen minutes a week.

Design of the Study

The study applies an exploratory design for the following reasons. Firstly, the type of design is for exploring "unknown areas of research," although the studied problems may have been in

existence for a while (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 44). This is true for the paper since there has been little effort in investigating EFL student engagement in higher education during the pandemic in Vietnam. Moreover, its open and inductive nature is expected to help the writer have a more in-depth look at what is being investigated (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

Data collection & analysis

The data is collected through two research tools. Firstly, a demographic questionnaire is issued to the participants individually on Google Form. The questionnaire contains two parts, including both closed-ended and open-ended items. While the first part aims to gather the background information of each respondent, the second part focuses on the participants' general views about their e-learning experience. Secondly, four group interviews with five to six members in each are initiated on Zoom to gather their insights about how they evaluate their engagement in learning English online and what may influence it. This type of interview is chosen since it possesses certain characteristics which are identical to the ones of this project. Firstly, focus groups are suitable for creating comfort for any participants to express their emotions, beliefs, or perceptions (Anderson, 1996). Secondly, respondents are not constrained in terms of waiting for their turn to speak, which is encouraging to every member as they can exercise freedom of speech (Birmingham, 2014). Also, according to Birmingham (2014), a group interview proves more advantageous than an individual interview because the former can initiate a snowball effect. Specifically, an in-depth discussion can start with one member sharing his thoughts which are responded to by other members. This can give rise to a great deal of information regarding the respondents' perspectives about a topic.

The information gathered from the questionnaire, especially from its second part, is expected to help the writer better understand the participants' perceptions of their English e-learning experience. These perceptions can support the design of the questions used in the focus group to effectively capture the groups' beliefs about their engagement in English e-learning.

It should be noted that since the participants are non-major English students whose proficiency may not be insufficient to communicate in English with ease, both the questionnaire and focus-group interviews are conducted in Vietnamese then translated into English by the author.

Results/Findings and discussion

This part presents the findings from the questionnaire via Google Form and four group interviews conducted on Zoom.

A. Questionnaire

There is a total of five items. Table 1 reveals the findings from the first four closed-ended questions aiming to gather demographic information.

Table 1: Demographic information

Question	Results (%)
1. What is your current academic year at HUFU? ➤ First-year ➤ Second-year ➤ Third-year ➤ Fourth-year	8.7 69.6 13 8.7
2. What is the current English course you are enrolling in at HUFU? ➤ Basic English ➤ English 1 ➤ English 2 ➤ English 3	13 30.4 30.4 26.1
3. What type of device are you using to study English online at HUFU? ➤ A laptop or a personal computer ➤ A tablet ➤ A smartphone ➤ Others	56.5 0 43.5 0
4. How do you rate your English e-learning experience at HUFU? ➤ Positive ➤ Negative ➤ Neutral	34.8 0 65.2

As can be seen from the table, most of the participants are in their second year at HUFU, which also explains the English course they are taking. In terms of their means of learning online, slightly more than half of the respondents claim they own a laptop or a desktop computer, while the remaining use a smartphone to study. The responses to the fourth item suggest that the participants tend to hold a neutral position regarding their online English learning experience. These are illustrated further through the last item, which requests the respondents to clarify their choice in the fourth item.

Regarding the fifth item, eight out of twenty-three respondents claim to be satisfied with their e-learning reveal several reasons. Firstly, three of them suggest they receive great support from their teachers. Secondly, the other two claims that online learning can ease their nerves interacting with their lessons or teachers. The remaining three believe e-learning helps them save time traveling to school. Below are some of the responses supporting English e-learning due to positive teacher support, interaction, and accessibility, respectively.

My teacher is very supportive. She always observes the class to provide help.

The lecture always pays attention to my answers and helps me correct my grammar errors.

I feel comfortable when talking to my teacher.

I can send messages to my teacher privately to ask for help without disrupting the class.

I can save time traveling to the campus and back to my place.

The remaining fifteen participants, however, have mixed opinions about their experience. Although they still admit the benefits of this learning method, such as helping them avoid the risk of being infected by the virus or instantaneous access, the same survey takers raise their concerns about the drawbacks, including unstable connection, insufficient teacher aid, and infrequent poor interaction. The typical comments can be found below.

The good thing about e-learning is it prevents me from getting the virus, but I find it very hard to practice speaking and listening.

I can stay safe during the pandemic, but I sometimes lose track of learning due to my poor wifi connection.

I think everything is boring because my teacher is just trying to finish a lesson. It's particularly hard to communicate with a foreign teacher because I don't always understand everything, and there is little support from my Vietnamese teacher.

Moreover, there is one response relating to the matter of task design, which should encourage interactions.

I think there should be some fun activities added to a lesson. For example, I would prefer the type of game that raises interactions among students.

B. Focus-group interviews

After all the respondents complete the questionnaire, they are formed into four groups with a different schedule to conduct a group interview via Zoom. While two groups contain six members, the other two have five. This meets the condition to carry out group interviews which is "...though fewer than four may jeopardize the valuable group dynamic you seek, and more than twelve may make the group unwieldy." (Birmingham, 2014, p. 98). In each focus group, six questions will be raised to gather insights from the participants. While the first item aims to investigate how each group comprehends the concept of student engagement, the next four questions are designed to measure each dimension of student engagement among the participants. Finally, the third item is to collect the participants' comments on what can determine their engagement in learning English online. All the items have been translated and they can be found in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Students' perceptions towards engagement in English e-learning

Question	Content
1	In your own understanding, what is student engagement?
2	What do you think about the following when you study English online? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your focus • Your effort • Your responsibility
3	What do you think about the following when you study English online? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your feelings about the English language • Your feelings about your English lecturers
4	What do you think about your readiness to interact with your lecturers and classmates in any learning activities during an online English lesson?
5	What do you think about your learning strategies when you study English online?
6	In your opinion, what can influence your engagement in learning English online?

As Table 2 shows, items number 2, 3, 4, and 5 focus on exploring how the respondents evaluate their own engagement in their virtual English class. In particular, behavioral, emotional, social, and cognitive engagement are brought to the discussion, respectively. In addition, the design of these items is inspired by the work of Fredricks et al. (2004) in summarizing how behavioral, emotional and cognitive engagement can be measured. As for the item related to social engagement, it is based on what Svalberg (2009) suggests how this dimension can emerge.

The next section is for analyzing the responses from each group interview through which certain themes are expected to emerge.

1. The participants' definitions of student engagement

Regarding the first item, there are several overlaps about how the participants define student engagement. Specifically, the answers from all the groups demonstrate that learning engagement is a complex concept, which agrees with the previous literature (Finn, 1989; F. Newmann et al., 1992; Fredricks et al., 2004; Appleton et al., 2006; Mahdikhani & Rezaei, 2015). It can be concluded from the responses that student engagement, for these participants, emerges not only in a classroom but also before and even after it. These are shown in some of the most typical responses below.

For me, student engagement is the idea of a student paying all of his attention to a lesson. (Group 1 – Speaker 1)

Before coming to school, and the engaged student will prepare for a new lesson by reading materials in advance. (Group 2 – Speaker 1)

An engaged student always focuses on a lesson without doing any other irrelevant things. (Group 3 – Speaker 1)

An engaged student is ready to join any activities of a lesson. When having trouble, they

will ask their teacher for support. (Group 3 – Speaker 3)

If a student is engaged, he will spend extra time exploring further what is related to his subject. For example, I prefer playing video games because I can always learn more English vocabulary from them. (Group 4 – Speaker 2)

2. Measuring behavioral engagement

The second item aims to study how the participants perceive their degree of behavioral engagement. In particular, they are asked to evaluate their own degree of focus, effort, and responsibility when learning English online. These three categories are suggested by Fredricks et al. (2004) in their effort to summarize how to measure behavioral engagement. The findings suggest that these participants' behavioral engagement fluctuates depending on several reasons.

As for the level of focus, some participants claim to be very focused while the others do not. Below are some of the responses with their explanations

There are days when it rains heavily, I cannot hear anything my teacher is saying, so I cannot focus effectively. (Group 1 – Speaker 4)

I would say I am highly focused when my foreign teacher is in charge. He has many activities that encourage us to speak English and he also teaches at an appropriate pace. However, my Vietnamese teacher is very boring. (Group 2 – Speaker 3)

My Vietnamese teacher does not really create an interest for us to study, so I barely pay attention to his lesson.

I know learning English is about interacting, but this is missing in my online lessons, so I lack my focus. (Group 3 – Speaker 4)

In my online classes, there are always chances for my friends and me to interact. Therefore, I am usually focused on these tasks. (Group 4 – Speaker 1)

Sometimes, the connection from my teacher's device is not good. It really bothers me. (Group 2 – Speaker 1)

For the second category, about half of the participants in each group state they have been putting a great deal of effort into online learning.

I think my effort is high because I want good results from this subject to boost my overall GPA. (Group 1 – Speaker 3)

I must take a TOEIC test in the near future, so I think I have to work hard on studying English. (Group 1 – Speaker 6)

I figure I can try more when learning online since I can interact without showing my face. (Group 2 – Speaker 2)

My friends' good English also pushes me to try more. (Group 3 – Speaker 5)

I can try to study English more when doing it online because I have more freedom to

learn by instantly using Google or an online dictionary to help me answer a teacher's question, which is something I cannot do in a traditional class. (Group 4 – Speaker 5)

However, the remaining interviewees admit they have not tried enough to learn English online because of some common causes. They are not having an interest in the language, missing learning materials, being distracted, and experiencing interrupted connection.

As a student majoring in natural science, I don't have much interest in English. That's why I have little effort in learning it. (Group 1 – Speaker 2)

I used to study this subject very hard in my real classroom. But when we do it online, it's not the same anymore since I am easily distracted by my surroundings. (Group 1 - Speaker 5)

I left my English coursebook in the city during the lockdown period, so it's really difficult to try to learn online without having a book next to me. (Group 2 – Speaker 3)

The unstable connection in my place reduces my effort in learning the subject. (Group 3 -Speaker 1)

When asked to rate their responsibility in learning English online, most members of the first two groups state they are highly accountable for this subject. Meanwhile, the same response also emerges from the other groups but with a lower frequency. The common responses admitting being highly responsible are below.

I believe I have great responsibility for my English learning since I will need to use English for my major, which is International Business. Besides, I don't want to disappoint my parents. (Group 1 – Speaker 3)

I can see that my teacher is trying very hard to teach us online, and my parents really have high expectations for me. Therefore, I must be responsible for my learning. (Group 3 – Speaker 5)

I'm never late for my English Zoom class and always turn on my microphone to answer my teacher's questions. (Group 1 – Speaker 5)

I think I and my friends are responsible especially during e-learning. We usually remind each other to complete our assignments, or we can support each other to answer a difficult question.

I realize that my English is not good enough, so I must be more responsible for improving it. (Group 1 – Speaker 4)

I understand there are many problems with e-learning, so I think I must be more accountable for myself. (Group 4 – Speaker 4)

It doesn't matter if I'm learning English online or offline. I take responsibility for my studies since I want to be as good as my two sisters, who use English very well. (Group 4 – Speaker 2)

Moreover, some members state that they can maintain their responsibility during e-learning better than traditional learning. The reasons for that are:

When I must study English at school, being late for class sometimes causes me to sit at the end of the room, and I cannot see anything my teacher is showing. But when it comes to e-learning, I can ask the teacher to rewind the parts that I have missed. (Group 2 – Speaker 5)

I admit I had become more responsible when I learned English online because back then, when I studied offline at school, I was distracted by my part-time job. However, due to the lockdown, the only thing I do is study, which doesn't scatter my responsibility. (Group 2 – Speaker 1)

The rest of the interviewees state they are less responsible for studying English during their e-learning. Moreover, some of them argue they cannot maintain the same level of responsibility.

I feel more responsible during my offline class because I can be influenced by my friends. When knowing they have finished their tasks, I am urged to do the same. It's different when I study online since there is no one around to push me. (Group 1 – Speaker 6)

I agree. This is the same way I learn. I usually want to study with friends. (Group 1 – Speaker 1)

I do try to take note of my lessons but rarely go back and see the notes. (Group 3 – Speaker 3).

I agree I take pictures of the lesson slides, but I don't always revisit them on my phone, only when there's a test coming. (Group 3 – Speaker 4)

I understand that English is important for both the short and long term, and I also want to make my parents happy about my study. However, I must admit I don't really have high responsibility for learning it since I am not interested in the language. (Group 4 – Speaker 1)

3. Measuring emotional engagement

a) Feelings towards English

Regarding emotions towards the English language, most of the participants from the four groups have a positive standpoint for various reasons, including the interactive power of English or its instrumental values.

I admit I haven't tried my best in learning English, but I always like the language. I used to serve at a restaurant, and knowing some English helps me communicate with the foreign diners there. (Group 1 – Speaker 5)

I like English because it can help me find a better future job. In addition, I can be a part of many communities, such as some clubs at our university or a group of freelancers.

(Group 1 – Speaker 6)

I love English when it comes to its communicative advantage. However, I find its grammar extremely hard. (Group 2 – Speaker 1)

Because I like English, I think the documents written in English are better than the ones in Vietnamese. (Group 3 – Speaker 4)

I have used my smartphone more often recently, and I discover there is a great Vietnamese person who speaks English very well. I think she makes me like the language more. Since then, I bought a notebook and started writing down new English vocabulary. (Group 4 – Speaker 3)

Nevertheless, few participants still have a neutral position against this language. Specifically, despite saying they like English, they also have negative feelings such as worry, tiredness, or disappointment.

I really like English, but I also feel discouraged since I haven't improved much after studying it for a long time. (Group 1 – Speaker 4)

I like English because it's fun, but I'm scared of its grammar rules. In addition, the Vietnamese people around me may think I am weird if I try to speak English. (Group 2 – Speaker 4)

I'm very concerned about my poor English vocabulary. (Group 3 – Speaker 5)

b) Feelings towards English lecturers during e-learning

The overall feeling from the groups is also positive about their English teachers during e-learning. Specifically, the participants have commented positively about their teachers' attitudes and support.

I agree, my teachers are so nice and funny. They always try to interact with us. (Group 1 – Speaker 5)

My teachers are friendly, and they make me feel safe when talking to them. (Group 2 – Speaker 5)

My teacher even took pictures of our coursebook and sent them to our Zalo group since some of us were unable to buy the book due to the lockdown. (Group 2 – Speaker 5)

My teacher often helps me correct my pronunciation mistakes. (Group 4 – Speaker 5)

c) Feelings towards online English lessons

Under this aspect, the participants are mostly satisfied with their online English lessons and their things.

There are some teachers usually trying to help students depending on what they need. For example, if they wish to speak English, then they can speak English. Or the teacher will help them to write in English if they need help in writing. (Group 1 – Speaker 6)

I sometimes prefer studying with a foreign teacher because he often includes games in his lesson, which is fun for me. (Group 2 – Speaker 4)

During my online lessons, my teacher usually tries to remind the students of important grammar points, which is different from my previous teachers. (Group 3 – Speaker 3)

I am satisfied with my online lessons since my teacher usually applies different techniques to make them more attractive. (Group 3 – Speaker 5)

I feel like my online lessons are more active than the traditional ones because my teacher usually involves games and interactive activities for us. (Group 4 – Speaker 3)

4. Measuring social engagement

Upon reflecting on their own social engagement in learning English online, while all members of the second group admit they are highly engaged in any interactive activities, the remaining have mixed opinions on how ready they are to interact in an online English lesson.

Because nobody can see my face, I feel more comfortable interacting. I don't have to feel embarrassed when making mistakes or criticized when volunteering to speak. (Group 2 – Speaker 1)

I think my readiness to interact depends on how difficult a task is. If it is not too hard, then I can use Google to help me seek answers and vice versa. (Group 1 – Speaker 2)

I only try to interact when knowing I may gain a bonus. (Group 1 – Speaker 1)

I have almost no problems interacting with my teacher, but it's not the same for my friends. Inside a break-out room on Zoom, they barely talk, although I try to support them, which really affects my mood. (Group 3 - Speaker 3)

I am less confident to interact with my foreign teachers because I'm afraid they don't understand me for my poor English vocabulary and pronunciation. (Group 4 – Speaker 4)

5. Measuring cognitive engagement

The last dimension to be measured from the groups relates to how the participants invested in their learning psychologically. While most of the responses from the first three groups indicate a low level of cognitive engagement in learning English online, the members of the last group appear to be more cognitively engaged.

I don't think I have an effective way to study English online. Everything is just boring since I have to keep staring at my screen. (Group 1 – Speaker 1)

I agree, I hesitate to ask my teacher during an online class while I don't have the same problem in a real classroom. (Group 1 – Speaker 6)

I feel very sleepy if my teacher is boring and I don't even know how to note my lessons properly though I have already prepared my notebook and pen. (Group 2 – Speaker –

Speaker 1)

I mostly sit still in my online lessons. There are times that I try to interact, but the poor internet connection stops me. I usually take pictures of the slides but rarely reexamine them. (Group 2 – Speaker 4)

I also figure online lessons can be recorded, which I can benefit from by being able to go back to study pronunciation. However, sometimes it does not matter how many times I revisit a recording. I still don't understand my foreign teacher since she spoke English all the time. (Group 2 – Speaker 3)

It depends a lot on my mood. On the day that I feel good, I can be very focused and take note of everything very effectively without needing any support. However, the same thing doesn't happen when I'm irritated by something. (Group 3 – Speaker 1)

I do know how to use technology to help my learning such as an online dictionary or lesson recording. However, I don't always review them. (Group 3 – Speaker 3)

Although most of the respondents from the first three groups have problems with their English e-learning, it is worth noting that the remaining ones have an opposite experience, which is identical to the findings from the fourth group.

I believe my e-learning experience is fairly effective since I always read the materials in terms of grammar and vocabulary prior to joining the class. Furthermore, I even review my lessons. (Group 3 – Speaker 5)

My teacher usually informs us of the upcoming lesson via Zalo. Therefore, I'm more well-prepared for it. (Group 4 – Speaker 1)

I usually preview my lessons and attempt to understand them more by using social networks or Google. (Group 4 – Speaker 3)

Whenever I don't understand a word from my lesson, I can quickly use an online dictionary to check for its meaning and pronunciation. (Group 4 – Speaker 4)

6. Factors affecting student engagement

Though the reasons for the participants' engagement in their English e-learning have been revealed through the previous four questions, the last question is still raised with the intention of summarizing and identifying more causal factors (if any) determining how engaged each participant is. In summary, there are five emerging themes from the group discussion, which are demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Contributing factors to student engagement in English e-learning

Factors	Sub-factors	Typical responses
1. Surroundings	Weather	<i>It sometimes rains heavily for a long time in my place. I cannot hear anything my teacher is saying, which is frustrating. (Group 3 – Speaker 1)</i>
	Internet connection	<i>I am very focused on the lesson until my internet connection is disrupted. (Group 1 – Speaker 2)</i> <i>Once I was marked absent because the teacher was checking attendance and my connect was unstable. (Group 2 – Speaker 5)</i> <i>There is no discount on my school fee, and I even have to pay for using the Internet which is sometimes very unstable. I feel very discouraged. (Group 1 – Speaker 5)</i>
	Family	<i>Sometimes while I am studying, my parents need me to do something for them, thus I become distracted. (Group 1 – Speaker 2)</i> <i>I am living in a big family and there is almost no privacy for me to study on Zoom. The noise makes it hard for me to focus. (Group 1 – Speaker 5)</i>
	Neighbors	<i>My neighbor is building his new house at the moment, and it is undoubtedly too noisy. (Group 2 – Speaker 3)</i> <i>My neighbors keep singing karaoke and I have to hear everything. (Group 3 – Speaker 3)</i>
2. Teacher	Teaching methods	<i>My teacher sometimes goes too fast in the lesson. I cannot catch up with it. (Group 2 – Speaker 3)</i> <i>My Vietnamese teacher sometimes speaks English during the whole lesson, and I cannot understand everything she says because of my poor English. (Group 3 – Speaker 3)</i>
	Interactions	<i>If my teacher can interact with me more, then my learning spirit is very high. (Group 3 – Speaker 2)</i> <i>When I can understand what my teacher is saying, I feel very positive. (Group 3 – Speaker 4)</i>
	Attitudes	<i>My teacher is just trying to finish his lesson as quickly as possible. (Group 3 – Speaker 2)</i> <i>My teacher's enthusiasm in a lesson can affect my learning. (Group 4 – Speaker 4)</i>
3. Feelings		<i>I am sometimes easily distracted during an online lesson since there's nobody there to supervise me. (Group 1 – Speaker 6)</i> <i>My emotions matter very much. If I am interested in a lesson or a task is within my capability, I will be more ready to study. (Group 3 – Speaker 1)</i>

4. Inefficient strategies to study online	<p><i>I think that many students, including me are not used to this new way of learning since we have been in a traditional classroom for a decade. (Group 2 – Speaker 4)</i></p> <p><i>A lot of my friends are from the center of Vietnam, and they have never studied via Zoom, so it is quite a challenge for them to adapt. (Group 2 – Speaker 3)</i></p>
5. Student role	<p><i>I think it depends a lot on a student himself. If he truly knows the subject is important, he will try his best to participate. (Group 1 – Speaker 4)</i></p> <p><i>One of the factors influencing a student’s engagement is the student’s motivation to learn. (Group 2 – Speaker 1)</i></p> <p><i>I believe the factors can be from the outside and from the inside of students to help them engage. (Group 3 – Speaker 5)</i></p>

Discussion

Overall, there are two common themes arising from the group interviews’ findings. Firstly, different participants possess a different degree of engagement in their online English class. Secondly, even though several other interviewees claim to have the same engagement level, the reasons for such claims also vary. Among the contributors to the respondents’ engagement in studying English online, some of them are also the same determinants to whether these participants have a positive or negative e-learning experience, which is explored in the questionnaire. Specifically, positive teacher support, having chances to interact, appropriate task design, and stable Internet connection should be guaranteed to foster students’ e-learning experience, through which their engagement can also be benefited. These findings corresponded to the work of Le (2021) and Nguyen and Nguyen (2021). The two studies are also conducted in Vietnam to explore the current situation of online learning at the tertiary level. When being asked to reflect upon their experience in learning English online during the COVID-19 outbreak, the participants’ responses are overlapped with what is discovered in this paper. As for the research by Nguyen and Nguyen (2021), the students’ constant unstable Internet connection, along with their insufficient technical skills, can dampen their e-learning experience. Regarding Le (2021), her findings are similar to this paper about the role of teachers in affecting undergraduates’ engagement in learning English online. More specifically, a teacher’s teaching methods, his lesson design as well as the motivation he gives to students play a major role in making them more or less engaged in learning English virtually (Le, 2021). Moreover, the respondents in Le’s study (2021) also show more engagement if they are given more chances to interact with their teachers and their classmates during an online lesson, which is one of the discoveries from the paper. Furthermore, other factors are also revealed through the last question of the group discussion.

Regarding the participants’ behavioral engagement, their participation in a virtual English lesson is determined by the role of their teachers, having opportunities to interact, and external factors, including internet connection or weather. As for their great effort and responsibility in

learning English online, the respondents are driven by meeting the academic needs of the school or parents as well as being inspired by their peers. Meanwhile, those who state they have not tried their best explain their low interest in English, not having enough materials, and an unstable internet connection are the causes. These findings are in alignment with the previously reviewed studies (Fredricks et al., 2004; Susanti, 2020 and Laili & Nashir, 2021). For example, the students in Laili and Nashir's study try to comply with their institution's rules by attempting to find another place with a better connection since the one in their house is broken. Moreover, Fredricks et al. (2004) confirm both teachers and peers have certain impacts on a student's behavioral engagement.

The findings in terms of emotional engagement reflect what Svalberg (2009) argues. Firstly, it can be high once students recognize "the immediate relevance" of their target language, which relates to the practical benefits of being fluent at it (p. 253). Secondly, the same driver can also make learners more autonomous in terms of their language learning. Thirdly, how a learning task is designed can also determine how emotionally engaged learners are. Furthermore, the work by Fredricks et al. (2004) also emphasizes the significance of teacher support. They propose that students may "experience emotional disengagement" if their teacher focuses on academic performances (p. 75). Fortunately, this is not the case for the groups in this study since they appear to have friendly and considerate teachers.

From the typical responses to the question about social engagement, it can be argued that feelings and affiliation have a crucial role in a student's level of social engagement. This has been confirmed by Phild and Duchesne (2016), with their argument being "Social engagement is closely linked to emotional engagement, particularly among child and adolescent learners where affiliation is powerful, at a period when peers provide a unique context for learning." (pp. 9-10). Furthermore, these results are identical to the studies by Laili and Nashir (2021) and Sari Famularsih (2020), in which students' boredom can stop them from interacting.

The low and high sense of cognitive engagement and the rationales behind it are similar to the findings from different scholars. Specifically, the responses admitting not having an effective way of learning English online indicate these participants possess a low level of self-efficacy, which is a determinant of low cognitive engagement (Greene, 2015; Asma & Asma, 2021). Moreover, the interviewees who have negative feelings such as boredom or sleepiness are bound to be poorly engaged. This is confirmed in the work of Svalberg (2009) and Greene (2015), when they conclude emotions or attitudes can enhance or diminish cognitive engagement. In addition, the fact that some participants state they do try to record the online lessons but seldom revisit them or only do that prior to a test reveals they are not persistent in learning. Meanwhile, being persistent is one of the indicators of deep cognitive engagement in learning (Fredricks et al., 2004; Greene, 2015). As for the participants with a higher degree of cognitive engagement, it can be understood from their responses that they possess a high sense of control in learning. In other words, it is "mastery goals" that make them more engaged (Green, 2015, p. 21).

Conclusion

The paper has reflected precisely how complex the concept of student engagement is. What form of engagement in learning English is being demonstrated by a student and what drives or impedes such demonstrations are challenging to explore. This is made even more troublesome during the coronavirus epidemic when all teaching and learning activities must be performed online, which poses several more challenges. According to the findings, a student may engage behaviorally and emotionally due to their high sense of compliance as well as a positive experience with their teachers. It can be implied from the results that teachers hold an even more pivotal role in the online learning context. If one can be more proficient in using the advantages of the Internet to create more intriguing online lessons, their students' interest in learning is likely to grow. In other words, the students become more effectively engaged in virtual learning. This can be accomplished by teachers receiving more trainings related to how to enhance their online teaching experience. However, the findings also reveal the participants are struggling with how to learn English online efficiently and such struggles can put their initial positive behaviors and emotions in jeopardy. This is also a gap from the study because it does not manage to investigate more in-depth why the participants have such a low degree of cognitive engagement. Therefore, the stakes are raised for future studies which should be aiming at discovering what is problematic to tertiary students' English online learning strategies and how to better the situation since e-learning has become an option rather than a solution in higher education.

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Biodata

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A Narrative Inquiry of a Vietnamese University EFL Teacher's Assessment Identity

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: narrative inquiry, teacher assessment identity

This research uses a narrative inquiry approach to explore the teaching and assessment practice of a lecturer working in one university in the northern part of Vietnam. To collect data, the research has adapted the Tree of Life activity (Ncube, 2006) as a narrative frame enabling the teachers to reflect on and share their stories about their assessment practice as well as the world in which they live and work. The theoretical framework is grounded Dewey's (1938) notion of experience and Clandinin and Connelly's (1990) three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry, while the conceptual framework is based on Xu and Brown's (2016) framework of teacher assessment literacy in practice and Looney, Cumming, Kleij and Harris (2017)'s reconceptualization of teacher assessment identity. The findings underscore the dynamic nature of language teacher identities, including their assessment identities, highlight the role the working context plays in shaping these identities, and illustrate how teacher assessment identities influence their assessment practice.

Introduction

It is undeniable that teachers are not only cognitive beings, they are also social beings (Barkhuizen, 2016): Inside the classrooms, they interact with their learners and develop relationships with them, and together they construct sociocultural worlds in which they live their teacher's lives with their learners. Outside their classrooms, teachers engage with other teachers, learners, and administrators in their schools. And even further afield, they are members of many other communities, personal and professional, local and global. Teachers perceived as thinking and social people are not merely implementers of a syllabus or instructors of a linguistic skill like robots in a factory. In addition, as one species of mankind, each individual teacher possesses their own differences (Hoang, 2021). Accordingly, they do not simply perform their classroom practices, including assessment practices, as a cognitive being, and they do not perform their assessment practices in exactly the same way as any other teacher.

Rather, they bring their own past, present, and future experiences and even personal, social, and professional experiences into the process of developing their own identity as an assessor of language. However, such a topic has received little attention in the context of teacher education in Vietnam.

Literature review

The theoretical framework for this research was grounded on two pillars, namely Dewey's notion of experience and Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry landscape, while the conceptual framework of teacher assessment identity is based on Xu and Brown's (2016) framework of teacher assessment literacy in practice (TALiP) and Looney et al.'s (2017) reconceptualization of teacher assessment identity.

The experience takes a central role in Dewey's philosophy and his epistemology. Dewey (1938) considered the nature of human experience as having these two characteristics: continuity and interaction. Experience is an encounter with nature, with other people, and with the self. Each person's experience will influence his/her future experience, creating continuity between past, present, and future experiences. Through interaction with nature and with other human beings and with oneself, one obtains knowledge and experiences, which eventually influence the way one perceives nature and his/her encounter with other people and him/herself. In this way, Dewey's concept of experience is transactional, which corresponds well with the exploration of teacher lives (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). From the narrative inquirer viewpoint, teachers' exploration of the experiences via narratives allows them to (re)formulate their identity. By exploring the relationship between teachers and their experiences, the researcher and participants can understand what was happening, creating new experiences that then become part of future experiences.

Using Dewey's theory of experience as the conceptual and imaginative backdrop, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argue that narrative inquiry embodies theoretical ideas about the educational experience as lived and told stories. For them, the study of narrative is "the study of the ways humans experience the world" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.2). Narrative researchers seek to view the lives of their participants and themselves as a whole into which the fragmented parts of narratives can be integrated and embodied (MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002). To cover multiple aspects of participants' life experiences, narrative inquirers are placed within a three-dimensional space of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Temporality or continuity is the central dimension of the inquiry process. Each event being discussed must be seen as having a past, a present, and an implied future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this way, the narrator needs to look backward to earlier experiences, connecting them with current happenings and looking forward to the future and experiences that might be anticipated. The second dimension of the inquiry space, sociality or interaction, combines the personal and social experiences, involves sharing life experiences through which the storyteller looks inward to their feelings, hopes, and desires and outward to existential environments. The

last dimension, place or situation, attends to the "specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.51). In other words, this concerns the locations in the storyteller's geographical spaces, which provide added meaning to the stories being told.

The research adopts Xu and Brown's (2016) six-component framework of teacher assessment literacy in practice (TALiP) regarding the conceptual framework. The six components within the framework of TALiP are interrelated, and the framework is cyclical in nature. Changes occurring in one component are contingent upon changes in another as the framework has multi-directional flows.

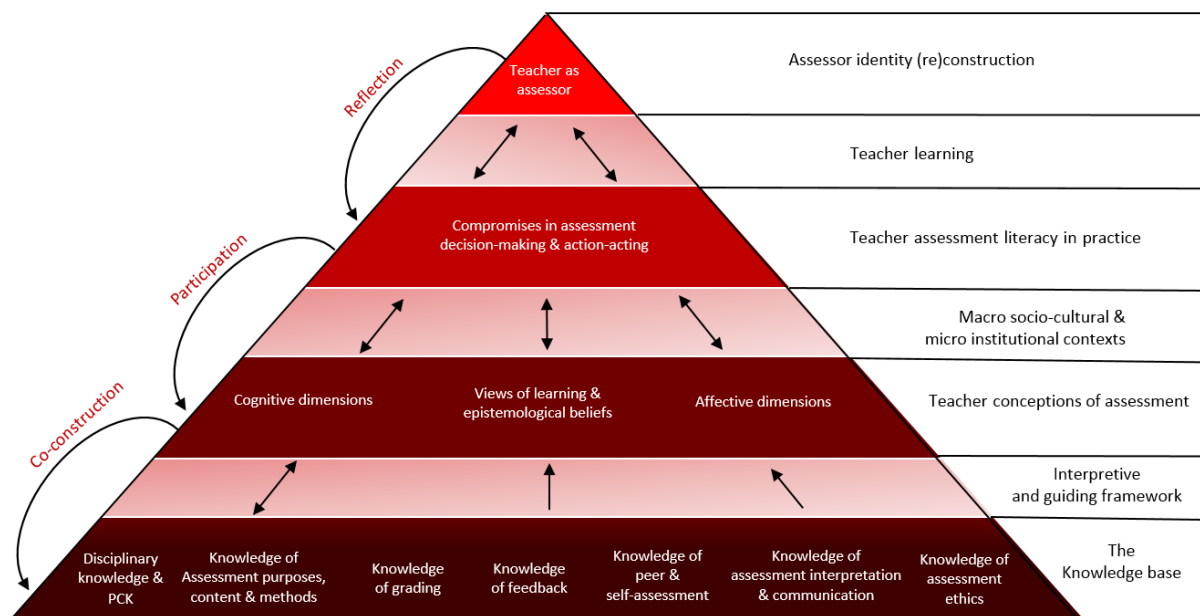


Figure 1: Teacher’s Assessment Literacy in Practice (Xu and Brown, 2016, p.15)

The previous framework has informed this framework of teacher assessment literacy (e.g., Willis et al., 2013; DeLuca, 2012). The position the knowledge base as the first component at the foundation of the pyramid acknowledge the importance of having relevant knowledge (7 types) for effective assessment practice. The second component of the framework is the teacher's conception of assessment as an interpretive and guiding framework. Teacher conceptions are both collective and individualized. They are influenced by policy embedded in specific socio-cultural and institutional contexts (Brown, 2008; Smith et al., 2014) while also subjected to an individual's personal and educational experiences (Hill et al., 2010). The cognitive dimension of teacher conceptions of assessment denotes what teachers believe is true and false about assessment, while the affective dimension denotes emotional inclinations that teachers have about various aspects and uses of assessment. The third component of the framework is the micro- and macro- contexts, which function as the boundaries for TALiP. Teachers are bound by their immediate workplace community and also the larger social, political, and cultural contexts. Micro- and macro-contexts' policies, norms, rules, regulations,

and conventions in micro- and macro-contexts influence teachers' assessment practices. The tighter the boundaries, the less space there is for professional autonomy. Teachers are forced to make compromises to exercise their TALiP, which is the fourth component and the center of the framework. TALiP is a dynamic, complex entity consisting of various compromises which teachers make to reconcile tensions between teachers' conceptions of assessment and the sociocultural, micro institutional contexts and expected knowledge base (Xu & Brown, 2016).

The last two components of the framework, namely teacher learning and teacher assessment identity, play an important role in improving TALiP. As the dynamic, interactive, and contingent nature of classroom-based assessment changes the environment in which assessment literacy is operationalized, and because teachers have their own concerns and queries emerging from their classroom practices, they need to constantly reflect and adapt. Teacher learning occurs via reflective practice (Schon, 1983) and participation in community practices (Westheimer, 2008).

At the top of the framework is the teacher as assessor identity (re)construction. Although there is no ideal assessor identity, having a clear identity as an assessor will make teachers better authors of their own assessment practices with an enhanced agency to make more justified compromises in their assessment practices.

Research Questions

The present study is a part of an ongoing Ph.D. research project that aims to explore the (re)construction of teachers' assessment identity through narrative at a university in Vietnam. By investigating the teachers' shared stories about their language assessment work as part of their teaching career and situating such stories in multiple contexts, the project aims to explore how EFL university teachers, both experienced and novice ones, construct their assessment identity and how that identity influences their assessment practices.

Specifically, the present study is designed to seek answers to the following research question:

What does the teacher narrate about his experiences of language teaching and assessment practices?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The study was conducted at the Faculty of English, hereby referred to as the Faculty, at a public university in Hanoi, referred to as the university. The university was officially established in 1951 and since then has served as one of the leading institutions for the training of teachers, lecturers, and educational managers in the country. It plays a key role in and has a good reputation for educational research and innovation. The Faculty, however, was relatively new as it was established in 2003. In 2021, the number of teaching staff currently working is 33. Despite the small number of teaching staff, the Faculty is responsible for conducting a variety of English courses and classes for all students in the university, including English majored &

non-majored undergraduate and postgraduate students, non-majored English classes for master degrees & Ph.D. students, in-service teacher courses, as well temporary and short teacher professional workshops and training programs under the regime of the National Language Project. Therefore, the teaching staff at Faculty always have to cover more classes than necessary. Also, due to short working trips and training programs, the teachers frequently have to travel and skip class quite often, and there is no chance for make-up class due to the rigid timetable of the credit-training system. In addition, due to the lack of teaching staff and shortages of classrooms, most of the classes run at the Faculty have to be merged, which means an average language class size is at least 40 students of mixed abilities.

The participant of the study, referred to as Mr. Green, is a middle-aged university lecturer at a teacher training institution in Hanoi. He graduated from the College of Foreign Languages, Vietnam National University in 2004 and was employed to teach English at the College for two years before he enrolled in an MA in Applied Linguistics overseas. When he returned to Vietnam in 2008, he started working as a freelance English tutor but was soon recruited by the university. Since then, he has been working in the Language Proficiency Development Division, where he currently teaches academic English subjects. In addition, he occasionally delivers the Teaching Methodology and Language Testing & Assessment for undergraduate students for the ELT Division of the University. He participates in the faculty work; however, as he prefers to "explore the world outside the academia," he also works under contract terms with a private school in Hanoi and runs his private language classes at home.

The researcher has been acquainted with Mr. Green for more than ten years. We had experience working together in writing materials for new courses, various invigilating exams, and even co-teaching several courses. With a long history of collaboration, it is easier for the researcher to recruit Mr. Green for data collection in this study. The selection of the cases was based on four main criteria: nationality (Vietnamese), qualification (Master's degree in English language teaching), experience (teaching experience in the context of Vietnam), and teaching status (in-service). The participant was not intended to represent any teacher population, institution, or culture as my interest was in the uniqueness of an individual teacher.

Data collection & analysis

The data in this study were collected via individual, semi-structured interviews (conducted in English, the participant's choice). First, a 90-minute background interview was conducted with the participant to establish a profile of his educational and professional background, motivation to follow the teaching profession, and views on language teaching and assessment. At the end of the interview, the participant was introduced to the Tree of Life (adapted from Ncube, 2006), an exercise based on using different parts of the tree as metaphors to tell stories about one's life (Ncube, 2006). Originally, the tree of life was created for professionals working with children affected by HIV/AIDS in southern Africa. The activity helped professionals get children to talk about their past in a non-traumatizing way and helped build a positive identity. In this study, the activity was adapted, and it served as an oral narrative protocol that supported the participant in reviewing his personal life experiences and articulating his stories (Farrell, 2007; Merryfield,

1993. It also allowed the researcher to have more in-depth data than what the background interview can provide. This activity aims to let the participant reflect and construct a visual manifestation of his teacher assessment identity. I started by asking the participant to think of the root of the trees, which symbolizes the values and beliefs that the participant has about language testing and assessment. Next, he reflected on the most important role he was playing in language testing and assessment. These roles were visualized as the ground on which their tree of life grows. There might be high and low grounds, referring to the importance of these roles to the participant. Next, the participant was asked to reflect on what he knew of language testing and assessment and what he was most confident doing. To investigate how interactions with different people in different places and over time, I asked the participant to also think about the leaves of the tree as those playing an important role in the participant's testing and assessment professional development and practice, the branches as the hopes and goals he wants to achieve in the future, and the fruits and flowers representing, respectively, the gifts he received from others and the legacies he wants to pass on to his students, colleagues, and etc. The challenges that the participant experiences, e.g., the various constraints in his different workplaces, are visualized as the storms in the picture. The vertical axis of the tree represents the timeline with different critical incidents, while the horizontal axis represents the various contexts where the participant conducts his assessment work. The leaves, flowers, and seeds represent the interaction dimension in my version of the tree of life. The following figure represents a model of the tree of life.

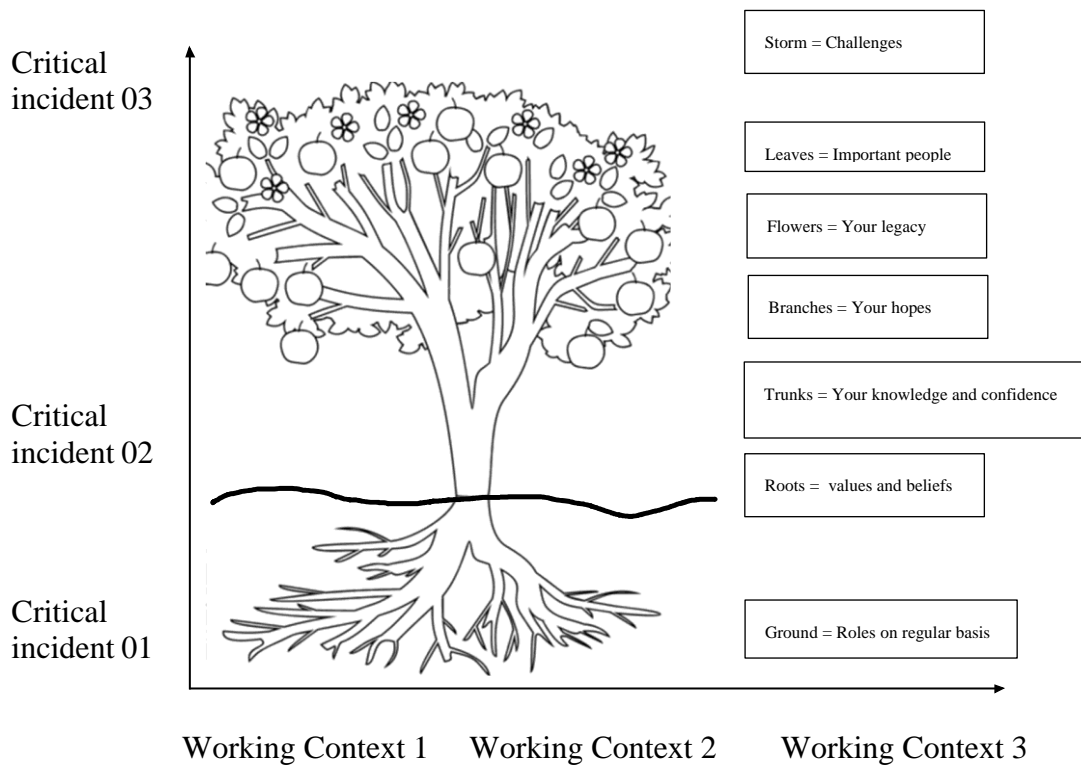
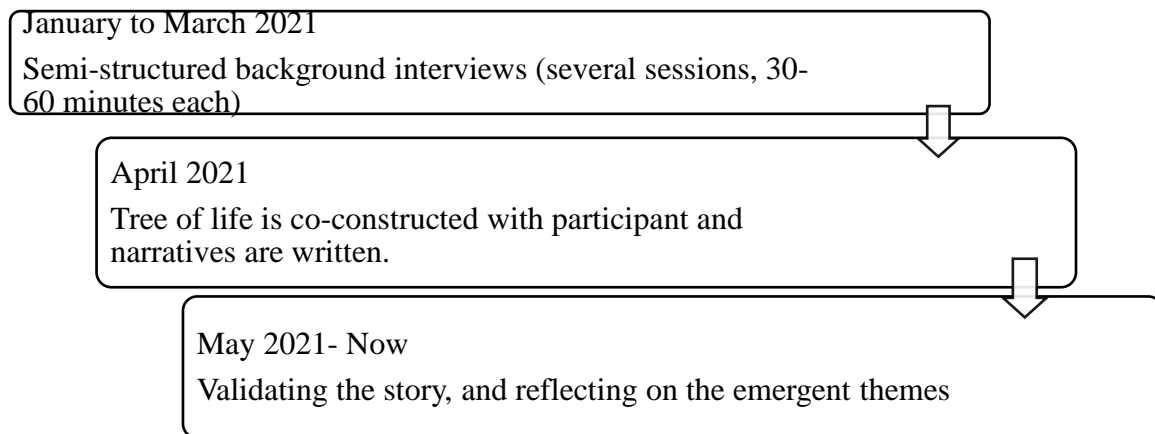


Figure 2: The Tree of life template

After the tree of life was constructed, the participant took time to reflect on it and then presented it to the researcher with a verbal explanation of the different components of the tree. During the process, the researcher asked questions about the tree and discussed with the participant about the critical incidents, important people, and contexts of assessment practice with the participant. The participant was allowed to modify his drawing of the tree during the discussion. As a result, the tree of life, to some extent, was the participant's co-constructed and narrated assessment identity. In addition, the use of this Tree of Life frame allowed the participants to locate themselves in the three-dimensional framework of temporality, sociality, and place.

The following chart documented the procedure of data collection with Mr. Green. However, the procedure is not conducted in a linear manner, as the tree of life and narratives of the participants were constantly revised, and the stories were co-constructed during the process as new data were collected.



The participant's stories and narratives were first recorded. Based on the participants' reflection on their Tree of Life, I provided an interpretation (also known as the re-storying process) of his narratives by using the three-dimensional inquiry space: interaction, situation, continuity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) before discussing the emerged themes. In other words, the construction of narrative texts in this stage followed the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework.

Design of the Study

The study followed the story-telling path of narrative inquiry research (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000).

All data underwent thematic, cyclical analysis. First, the participant's answers were transcribed and then coded according to the five dimensions of Looney et al.'s (2017) framework and that of Xu and Brown (2016). After that, I analyzed data iteratively throughout the period of fieldwork, using Dewey's notion of experience and Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry landscape as the theoretical framework to explore how teacher assessment identity has been constructed and reconstructed over time in different places, and in relation with the interaction with other important figures in the participant's life and work experiences.

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, informed consent was obtained from the participant. His anonymity was maintained throughout via the use of a pseudonym and omission of identifying details. The participant was allowed to refuse to answer any questions he deemed intrusive. I briefed the participant before every interview and performed member checking at the end of the project by asking him to read through the data and analysis and identify any misrepresentation of the data.

Findings and Discussion

The article reports on the formation of teacher assessment identity formation of Mr. Green based on the analysis of a background interview (BI) and life interview (LI). The findings are written in chronological order using a narrative style. The presentation includes quotes from the participants and additional comments from the researchers.

The following figure represents Mr. Green's Tree of life.

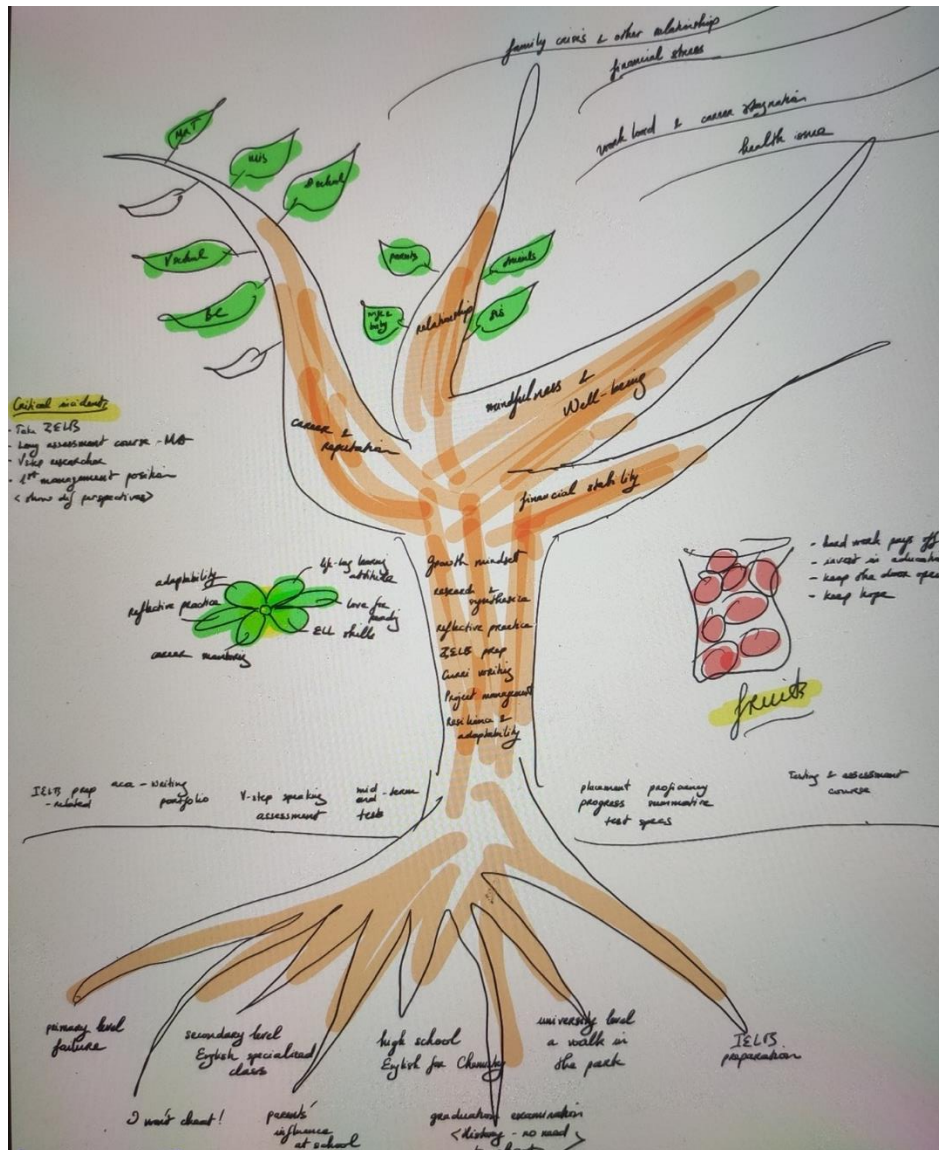


Figure 3. Mr. Green's Tree of life

The following section presents Mr. Green's Tree of life and his assessment identity using the three dimensions as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly: temporality, sociality, and place

The temporality dimension

From a student perspective

From his Tree of Life, it can be seen that Mr. Green's assessment was influenced profoundly by his educational experience. He recalled the first failure during the examination to a specialized school in grade 3, in which he got less than 3/10 points for Mathematics. Although he did not describe the experience as having a negative impact on his confidence, he acknowledged it as the earliest memory of testing and assessment.

"I don't think I was sad or disappointed. Rather, I was surprised as I thought I did quite well during the test. I told my parents there must be something wrong. My father did not say anything, though. I think he was disappointed to some extent."

During his primary and secondary education, Mr. Green did not do very well in different kinds of tests and assessments. The fact that his mother worked as a teacher at his school did make his life a little easier, as the teachers tended, as he claimed, to be more lenient towards marking his paper. He recalled several times when he and his friend submitted a similar piece of writing during a 15-minute written test. His scores were always higher. For Arts and Crafts, he sometimes received extra help from the teachers who were also his neighbors. Recalling these stories, Mr. Green reflected that he was not grateful for this extra help. In fact, he sometimes "rebelled" against it. Exams were a stressful experience for him.

"I was not doing very well during these English examinations. One teacher frankly told me to copy the work of my deskmate. The boy was also willing to let me do so, as I often let him copy my answer in the Math examination. I refused right away. Although I was quite small, grade 5 or 6, I had my own pride. It was ok for me to let him copy my work, but I did not want to rely on his help. Getting low marks was ok for me at that time."

This rigid attitude towards fairness started to change as the participant entered high school. As he realized that each person has strong and weak points, he actively participated in "trading his English answers" for his friends during the Chemistry examination. This period boosted his confidence about language ability since he is considered the best student in English in his class.

The participant's more flexible attitude towards testing and assessment is also clear in his narrative episode presented below about the graduation examination. He lacked time to prepare for the History test properly, so for the first time in his life, he decided to make a mini cheat book of the materials he did not learn by heart. Putting the cheat book in his pocket, he nervously walked into the exam room.

"This was a stupid and risky decision. I did not use such a mini cheat book before, so there was a high probability that I would be caught red hand. That would be a shame, not just for myself, but for my family as well. Luckily, I did not need to use the cheat book. I swore to never do it again, and I have kept my promise until now."

The first critical incident in Mr. Green's narratives happened in the last year of his tertiary education. Right before graduating from his teacher training program, he decided to take the IELTS examination to prepare for job hunting. With thorough preparation and hard work, he scored an overall 8.0 score. In 2004, there were not so many students with a score of 8.0, and his name was featured on the board at the front door of IDP, one of the two IELTS examination organizers in Hanoi. This incident undoubtedly boosted his confidence greatly and contributed positively to his identity formation.

"I participated in several English examinations before, but IELTS was an international testing system this time. Students were sitting at least one meter away from each other, and there was no cheating. I was proud of my score, and, for the first time, I could proudly see myself as a successful language learner. I realized that I am worthy."

So far, Mr. Green's narratives have shown that he had shifted from having a rigid attitude towards testing and assessment to having a more flexible, even unethical, attitude to some extent. In addition, his perspective of exams as a stressful experience also started to change as the critical incident plays a crucial role in shaping his identity as a successful language learner.

From a postgraduate's perspective

In 2005, Mr. Green enrolled in his MA degree program overseas. The very first course he took was Language Testing and Assessment. Being an international student, he was nervous at first. This was also his first time alone, far away from his family.

"The course book was Language Testing, written by Tim McNamara. The course changed my understanding of testing and assessment completely. During my pre-service training, there was only a book chapter about Testing and Assessment. My understanding of the concept was vague. The course helped me to see that there was much more [in Testing and Assessment] than giving students different labels. I learned about Test Washback and Critical Language Testing. It was an eye-opening experience."

This incident was a positive experience for Mr. Green, marking a milestone in his professional development. He became more interested in testing and assessment and read widely about the subject. The teacher assessment identity now plays a larger role in his identity formation than a language teacher and a successful language learner.

From an item writer for VSTEP

VSTEP stands for Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency, the first standardized English proficiency test in Vietnam. The test specification and format were developed by language testing experts from the University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS), Vietnam National University, Hanoi (VNU, Hanoi). It was released nationally under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) on 11 March 2015. Mr. Green, after completing his MA study, was invited to be part of a VSTEP research team at one university in Hanoi. He was involved in item writing and conducting pilot tests. The experience

was generally not positive, as Mr. Green realized that there were several shortcomings to the test specification design, the item writing process, and the implementation of the test. While he acknowledged the usefulness of the exam, he withdrew from the team to do, in his words, "more meaningful work."

"I remember sitting in a small room with a group of six to seven experts. They were high-profile people holding high positions at the university. We were arguing over word choices for MCQ questions. There were no native speakers in the room, so we had to refer to the dictionary constantly. That did not make sense to me. After all, we were all non-native speakers of the language. The meeting went on for the whole morning, and I frequently asked myself whether what I was doing really benefited my students."

In this episode, the incident has left a negative impact on Mr. Green's teacher assessment identity development as he believed he could do more to support his students instead of wasting his time working on item writing for the standardized test. Thus, conflicts emerged between the assessment identity and the teacher identity. As Mr. Green withdrew from the research group, his assessment identity diminished.

From a management position's perspective

In this fourth critical incident of his teacher assessment identity formation, Mr. Green shared how becoming the manager of the English program at a school changed his perspective and reconfirmed the importance of having good assessment and standardized tests. As he was in charge of designing the curriculum, recruiting teachers, coordinating the teaching and learning of the subject, and conducting quality assurance and quality control, Mr. Green now had the larger picture of English teaching and learning at a school level. He was responsible for the learning of thousands of students in the school, while previously, he only cared about the small number of students in his class at the university or at home. The following quotation reveals his belief about the importance of placement tests.

"I came to learn about the importance of having good quality placement tests. If students are not categorized and grouped into classes with students of their similar level, teachers will struggle with a class of mixed abilities. Students in the class will suffer as well, as teachers will mostly adjust their teaching based on the average level in the class. It is easier to talk about differentiated instruction than do it. Not all my teachers are of that level. Few of them are familiar with the concept. As a manager, I have to minimize such a challenge."

From the temporality dimension in Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) framework, Mr. Green's assessment identity has changed over time as he experienced the four critical incidents presented above. The incidents also allow featuring his attitudes towards standardized testing and assessment from four different perspectives.

The sociality dimension

Mr. Green's Tree of life has two leaves symbolizing the two important people who have contributed to the construction of his assessment identity. The first important figure is his father, who is a retired secondary and high school teacher. Mr. Green was channeled the love for teaching by his father, who believes that teaching is the noblest job. He sat in his father's literature class for students of different age groups, including those from grade 6 to grade 12. An important belief about assessment, greatly influenced by his father, is that the most important purpose of assessment is to help students to improve by providing the teacher information about the weakness of the students. In other words, formative assessment is what he embraces. His father downplays the role of summative tests and often be generous with the marking of such tests in order not to disadvantage his students as the Vietnamese culture values students with high scores in academic transcripts.

"I [Mr. Green] recalled that he was a strict marker, especially in his evening classes. As his student, I also received several bad marks myself. Yet, when the end of the semester came, most students got much better marks. Even those who scored lower than 5, he would give them a bonus or extra tasks to increase their GPA if they requested. Every semester I collected dozens of students' compilation of poems from different Vietnamese poets – his favorite extra task for these underperforming students."

Another important figure contributing to Mr. Green's appreciation of formative assessment is his lecturer and mentor in his MA program overseas. The lecturer employed Mr. Green to work as his tutor in the last semester of his study. Mr. Green's job involved marking undergraduate students' assignments and even theses. He recalled that there were strict procedures to follow and well-designed rubrics to help make the marking objective and fair for all students. Yet, his lecturer advised him to take into consideration that many students in the course are international students who were disadvantaged to some extent in terms of language proficiency.

"When we [Mr. Green, his mentor, and other lecturers marking students' theses] sat together to discuss the students' grades. Stefan [his mentor] reminded me of the threshold between different grades. 85 is a 7 [the highest score], and 84 is only a 6. 76 makes no difference compared to 84, as they both mean a 6. Yet, the international students will feel much better if they score more than 80. I learned to be more lenient towards these students while still maintaining the standards of the Faculty."

Regarding the fruits of the Tree of Life which symbolize the gifts received from other people, Mr. Green appreciated what he had learned from his colleagues at the University several useful things, ranging from the practical techniques in evaluating speaking proficiency to even mindful practices to keep calm and be objective in his assessment.

"While the pre-service education only provided me with a theoretical background of testing and assessment, the mentoring program at the Faculty allowed me to shadow the experienced teachers who were willing to share with me tips and tricks as well as valuable knowledge of their assessment practice. I have learned a great deal during these

years. Even after the program had concluded, I learned from the chit-chat with other colleagues during the mid-morning recess. Being in a community helps me grow as a teacher."

Finally, in terms of the legacies or the impact he hoped to create, Mr. Green drew four petals of a flower to represent the knowledge and values he shared with students, colleagues, and those around him. He hopes to contribute to the mentoring program, shares his testing and assessment skills, reflective practice, and life-long learning attitude. He shared how he learned about the long-lasting effect he created when meeting a student whom he taught ten years ago in the following quote.

"We were both in the IT room of the school, waiting to have our laptop fixed. I did not even recognize her as she was a student in one of the first classes I taught in the first few years of my teaching career. She told me of the time she delivered a presentation in front of the class and talked to her after the lesson and gave her a note writing down some sounds she needed to practice. She thanked me for the effort and for making her realize her weakness."

This quote attests to the strength of formative assessment in helping students reflect on their performance to get better. For Mr. Green, in this way, feedback of assessment is a powerful education tool.

The situation dimension

This section presents how different contexts or working environments influence the participant's assessment practice. Mr. Green has included two important places in his Tree of Life. They are the university where he is working full time and the tutoring classes he has at home.

At the University, Mr. Green is responsible for assessing students participating in his courses and also worked as the examiner in several end-term exams and occasionally as a VSTEP speaking examiner. He embraced formative assessment as an assessment for learning in his course and recognized the need to be subjective in assessing students' performance. Yet, he described himself as a lenient marker in standardized exams and summative exams.

"I value the formative assessment tasks more than the end-term assessment as for me it is more important to help students to improve. I tend to be more lenient in the end-term tests as the score will impact the students' future. Another university tends to give students much higher marks, and that practice makes their students more competitive in the job market."

In his tutoring classes at home, his attitude toward assessment changed drastically. As this is his own business, he needs to be responsible for each student's progress in the course, and both formative and summative assessment plays a different role in his assessment practice. He explained this in the following quote.

"Their parents trust me totally with their learning progress. They pay a large sum of money too, so I need to use everything available to monitor their progress and help them improve. The assessment tasks [at the center] are not high-stake tests, so I can be fair and strict. When I conduct an assessment for learning in the lesson, I am their friendly teacher, willing to point out their shortcomings and give them a chance to improve. When I do an end-course exam, I am strict and want them to learn of their true ability."

These different attitudes toward assessment practice exhibit how a teacher's assessment identity shifts and changes according to the working context. This agrees with the growing body of literature spanning multiple disciplines pointing to the salience of place or situation as an active contributor to identity formation.

Discussion

Although the previous section only presents some findings from the narrative of Mr. Green, I have identified the following themes.

First, teacher assessment identity is an integral part of teacher identity. Depending on the different stages of the participants' teaching career and the places of their teaching practices (e.g., at the main workplace, at their private teaching sessions, at the test venues), the assessment identity might work against or support their teaching identity. Mr. Green even considers himself a soft assessor when he conducts assessment work at the university. He believes more in documenting the progress students make during the course rather than relying on the result of half-baked assessment tools created by the institution. From the preliminary findings, I propose below a simple diagram illustrating how one's teacher assessment identity can work together or separately from one's teaching practice. The teacher assessment identity moves back and forth among the four quadrants depending on their career development, the context of their teaching, and the interaction with people around them.

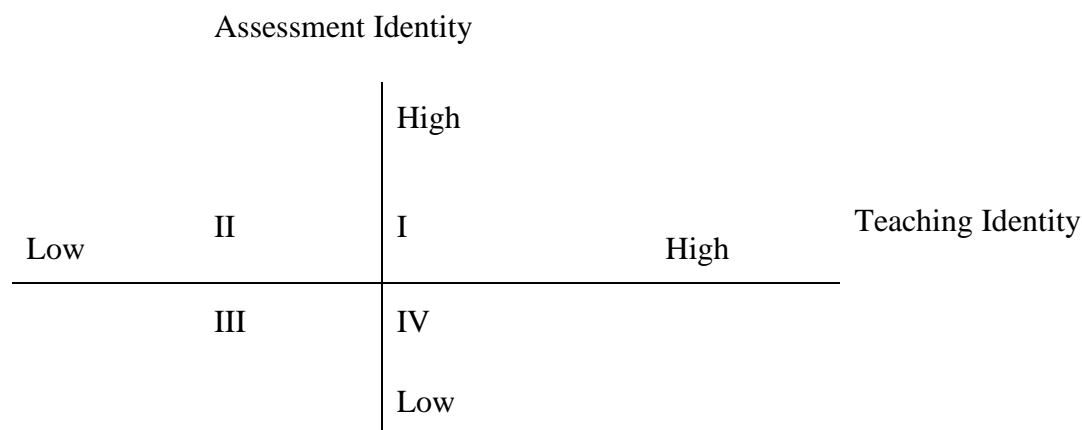


Figure 6. Four quadrants of teacher assessment identity

In quadrant, I, teacher assessment identity integrates harmoniously with the teacher teaching identity. Teachers belonging to this quadrant are those who are aware of the benefits of using different forms of testing and assessments to improve their teaching. Teachers who locate themselves in the second quadrant are those who have realized the importance and benefits of testing and assessment in improving their teaching. They, however, align themselves too often with the role of an assessor at the expense of their investment in teaching activities. The third quadrant is for teachers who have low assessment identity and have the weakest teaching identity. They might be worn-out teachers or those who newly joined the teaching profession without proper training about teaching in general and testing and assessment. Finally, in the fourth quadrant are those teachers who downplay the application of testing and assessment. For these teachers, their main responsibilities are teaching or motivating students, and they tend to compromise in the form of soft marking when it comes to assessing their students.

It is important to note that there is no fixed or perfect teacher assessment identity, as depending on contexts and stages of career development, teachers move back and forth among the four quadrants.

Secondly, the participants reported positive and negative assessment-related critical incidents, although the number of negative incidents is more than positive. While the positive incidents help foster a positive self-image with teachers believing in the value of assessment, especially formative assessment, to inform students of their weakness and teach them to reflect on their own performance, the negative incidents were mostly related to institutional policies. These negative incidents diminish teachers' sense of agency, motivation, efficacy, and job satisfaction.

Thirdly, the development of teacher assessment identity is mostly influenced by the teacher's work experience and sharing from colleagues and mentors in the community of practice. Pre-service teacher training has a minimal and short-lived influence on the formation of teacher assessment identity.

Conclusion

The present study has adopted a holistic perspective to investigate the assessment identity of one Vietnamese English teacher, whose narratives indicate that the formation of his assessment identity is a complex process. The findings of the study underscore the discontinuity nature of teacher assessment identity and emphasize the role of different personal and professional factors in the formation of teacher assessment identity.

The findings of the study have clear implications for teacher education. For a long time, teacher education has often been regarded as “separate from the ongoing lives of teachers and student teachers” (Clandinin, 1992, p. 121), which shows the limitations of these programs in developing teacher identity. Therefore, it is recommended that teacher education should pay attention to and cultivate the richness and complexity of teachers' lives. This can be done via self-reflection, using tools such as the Tree of Life to support pre-service and in-service teachers in developing awareness of their assessment identity and the role of various factors in its formation.

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Biodata

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Exploring the contribution of a school to develop the language of disabled person

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: Language of disabled person, language learning, autism, language and communication

The purpose of this work is to develop an understanding of the language learning process of the disabled person. The significant role of an educational institution for language learning skills and communication skills is addressed based on a questionnaire survey. Children without Autism start learning a language from the very first day of their birth. But children with disabilities find it challenging to learn a language. Language learning is not impossible for disabled people if they get support from their families and get a supportive environment. The study demonstrated the language learning of disabled people in Bangladesh. This study also determines the learners' interest in language learning, the parent's & society's attitude towards learners, and the limitation of disabled learners' education. The scope also covers the context to find out some recommendations for the disabled learner. The researcher has collected data by nonparticipant observation and questionnaire survey. The analysis of data represents the present rate of disabled language learners. The result shows that the learners are much conscious about language learning and communication skill. The teachers are very much concerned about their learners. Besides, they give a chance to the learners to show their extracurricular activities. The outcome addressed that the educational institution provided a satisfactory platform for the learners however the facilities are needed to be improved.

Introduction

Language learning is a must to live in a society. The society maintains and manages its communication through language. But the people with disabilities lack this communicative power. They could not show their feelings or express their ideas by using language correctly. However, our government has initiated many programs and projects for ensuring the facilities of disabled people. Noman and Anisuzzaman (2011) say in their paper that the person who has long-term impairments like physical, mental, and intellectual; is a disabled person. The children with disabilities are left out of education due to a lack of facilities and awareness. So, the parents, teachers, and other concerned authorities should train the education of exceptional children. Their research found that there is not enough teacher in the school of disabled person.

They also found that children with disabilities face some limitations in education.

Most students with learning disabilities experience significant problems learning to read (Kavale and Reece, 1992). Students with disabilities could not realize their flaws. They could never understand that they should actively monitor the comprehension and reread the confusing passage. Wilson and Wong (1984) say that students with learning disabilities can sort confusing sentences into coherent clusters around subtopics. Still, with the instruction, they learn to constitute an organized paragraph. Cain (1996) finds that the students with learning disabilities have less knowledge of the structure of a story than the children on comprehension skills. They also have some drawbacks with vocabulary. The reports offer a natural transition from oral to written language given to children in their early grades (Westby 1985). In recent years, Nguyen and Ngo (2021) demonstrated the use of the internet for self-study, while Tran (2021) discussed the effectiveness of social networks as a source of language education. Some studies raise concerns about the language learning of disabled persons. McCracken (2021) discussed the autistic identity and its impact on the context of language learning. Bishop (2009) illustrated the specific language impairment for disabled persons. Tenebaum et al. (2014) investigated the relations between attention to word learning, understanding of the newly learned word, and measures of language ability among autistic children. Frith and Happe (1994) demonstrated the context of language and communications for persons with autistic disorder. These studies motivated the current research to incorporate the survey and perform the questionnaire on disabled children.

It has already been mentioned that the schools of disabled people in Bangladesh are not satisfactory. The disabled person did not get proper facilities in their schools as there is a lack of educators. There are also some other problems with facilities such as not enough accommodation, not enough instruments, issues with electricity, etc. In a developing country like Bangladesh, education is essential for the development of the country. But the system of education is not arranged correctly. This demonstrates the need to conduct a study based on a questionnaire survey from an autistic school that can address some important aspects of the language learning skills of disabled students. The reason for choosing an autistic school is because autism is also regarded as a type of disability. A detailed study of autism can be found in Kanner (1943). The most important aspects include and language learning skills and communication skills as well.

Language has its effectiveness in our daily lives, whoever the user is. Language is used by the people of every caste, creed, and region of the earth. Language has its variety, but every human being is subject to learning a language. The word "disability" means the limitations of movements, activities, and beliefs. So if a disabled person tries to remove these limitations at first, they need to develop their communication ability, language learning. A disabled person can understand their feelings by gesture or posture, but it is impossible to understand the complete sense without language. This study aims to develop an understanding regarding the contribution of a school that can help the students to learn language efficiently. The study is performed considering a questionnaire survey of an autistic school from the students. The questionnaire survey is conducted in an Autistic school of Cumilla City, and a survey is incorporated for the sake of this study. The goal of this work will address two possible research

questions: whether the language learning process is sufficient among the students after studying in an autistic school; whether the communication skills are developed among the students after learning in an autistic school. The survey results demonstrate that the schooling process is successful in developing the language skills and communication skills among the students.

Methodology

The methodology of this study contains several steps that include sampling, survey, data collection procedure, and research question. The steps are briefly described in this article.

Sampling

Sampling is the statistical procedure related to the selection of the individual observation and helps make statistical inferences about the population. In sampling, the data is collected from the group by comments. The primary data has been collected from an Autistic school in Cumilla city. This is Buddhi Protibondhi and Autistic School, and the participants are chosen randomly from the school. The number of students is 10. Before the survey, it is assured to the participants that the researcher will use the data for the research purpose only, and the researcher will maintain privacy strictly. The researcher used nonparticipant observation, survey, and discussion with the students as an instrument for collecting data. In a nonparticipant observation, the researcher must observe the subject of their study.

Survey

The researcher has used a survey study to extract specific language learning data of disabled persons through a questionnaire. The collection of data is one of the best methods. A survey is a detailed analysis of gathering information through a questionnaire or observation. The participants can quickly answer the questions within a brief period.

Data collection procedure and research questions

The researcher used two data collection procedures - primary data collection and secondary data collection procedure. In the primary data collection procedure, the researcher has collected her data from the school mentioned above of Autism. For collecting data, the researcher asked some questions to the participants for the questionnaire. All these questions were multiple-choice questions, and the participants gave their answers in "yes," "sometimes," and "no." The researcher has collected data from books, journals, articles, the internet, previous work, etc. The survey sought to answer the following survey questions:

1. Do you know the alphabet?
2. Do you know how to write a sentence?
3. Do you know how to say a sentence correctly?
4. Can you read a story/ passage?
5. Can you say the name seeing a picture?
6. Do you know how to use pronouns?
7. Do you know to count numbers?
8. Do you know how to greet?
9. Are you interested in language learning?

10. Do you know your family members?

Among the survey questions, the first seven questions are elected for defining the language skills, and the last three questions are defined for communication skills.

Results/Findings and discussion

Data collection

Figure 4.1 depicts that all the learners know the alphabet. In this regard, the basis of a language is clear to disabled learners. So, if the learners try, they can learn the language quickly. The chart shows that 100% of learners know the alphabet. From the above chart, it is found that the learners understand the basics of the language, which will help them learn further. In Figure 4.2, it is demonstrated that only 40% of learners write a sentence. From this chart, it has been found that 40% of learners say that they can write a sentence, whereas 60% of learners are unable to write a sentence. From this chart, the students, if tried then they will learn to write a complete sentence. Whereas in Figure 4.3, it is mentioned that 80% of Learners can speak a sentence without any grammatical error. This rate is very much surprising for a disabled person. In response to the third question, it has been found that 80% of disabled learners can say a sentence without any mistake, and only 20% of learners are unable to say a sentence. As most disabled learners are capable of uttering a complete sentence, it is a good sign for the disabled person that they make themselves able to share their thoughts and feelings. At the same in Figure 4.4, it is depicted that only 40% of learners can read a story. But they show much interest in the picture. In this chart, the researcher has found that only 40% of learners can read a report.

On the other hand, 60% of learners cannot read a story. From this chart, disabled learners should increase their reading capability. From figure 4.5, 90% of learners know the name of a picture. As they have a child-like attitude and are immature, they feel very excited whenever asked about any image. They like to draw and color on a picture. According to Hendricks (2015), in the case of learning a language, "drawing activity helps the student remember vocabulary." The graph represents that 90% of disabled learners can understand a picture, and they can say the name of a picture, whereas only 10% of disabled learners cannot understand an image. This picture helps the learners to learn vocabulary quickly. In Figure 4.6, the demonstration shows that 80% of disabling learners can use a pronoun.

Using pronouns in a sentence is essential to communicate with others. Communication is necessary for a disabled person to live in a society. It helps them to live freely and quickly get along well with others. From this chart, it has been found that 80% of disabled learners know the use of pronouns, and the rate of learners who do not see the use of the pronoun is 20% which is not very low than the knowing learners. Using pronouns in a sentence is very important, and the rate shows that disabled learners are very much interested in language learning. Figure 4.7 depicts that 100% of learners can count numbers. Counting numbers is also a part of communication; it helps the autistic person to identify objects. The chart shows that 100% of learners can count the number, and no learner cannot count the number. It is very much surprising that disabled learners are showing their interest in learning.

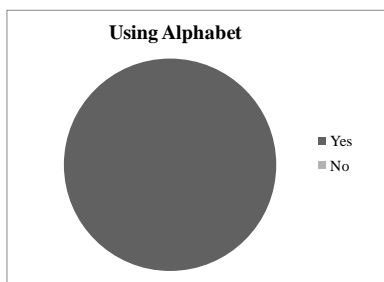


Fig. 4.1 Alphabet usage capability

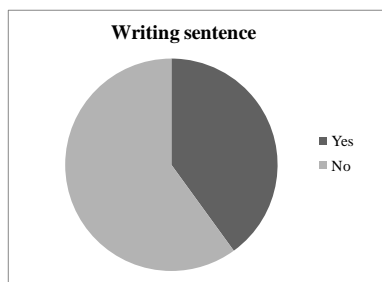


Fig. 4.2 Sentence writing capability

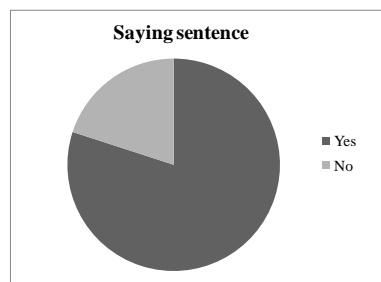


Fig. 4.3 Saying sentence capability

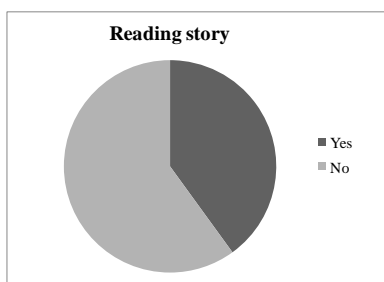


Fig. 4.4 Reading capability

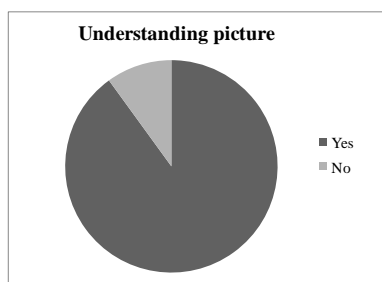


Fig. 4.5 Understanding picture

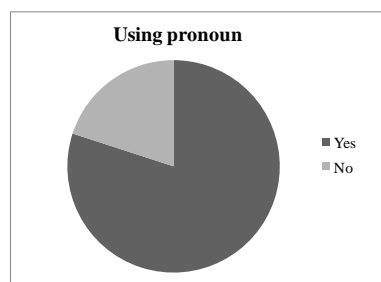


Fig. 4.6 Using pronoun capability.

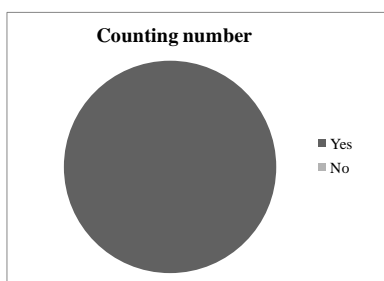


Fig. 4.7 Counting number capability

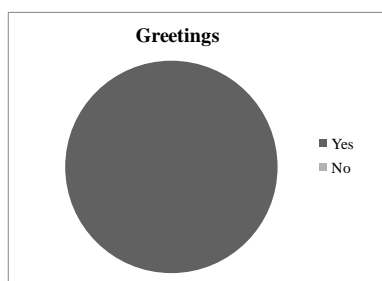


Fig. 4.8 Showing greetings capability

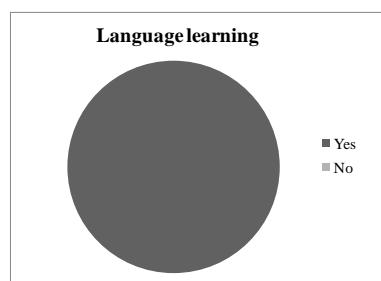


Fig. 4.9 Language learning capability

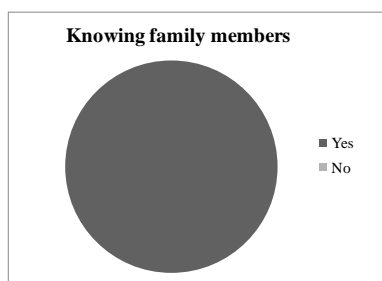


Fig. 4.10 capability of knowing family members

Figure 4.8 demonstrates that 100% of learners know how to greet others. Greeting helps to initiate a conversation with others. And it is perfect for the disabled person to understand how to welcome anyone. It also helps to understand the age as older and younger. They give 'Salam' to the elders and their teachers and say 'hello' to their mates. Education is the basic need of a person. From this chart, the researcher has found that 100% of learners can greet others. Greetings are necessary for communication, and the learners show their interest in contact with others by welcoming them. In Figure 4.9, 100% of learners are interested in language learning and education. Education is essential to living with dignity for the disabled person. It also helps to develop their psychology. In response to the ninth question, it has been found that 100% of students are interested in language learning the rate of learners who are not interested in language learning is 0%. It has been found that the disabled person is very much eager to learn a language as it is the only way to share feelings and show emotions. In Figure 4.10, it is depicted that 100% of learners know their family members. To recognize the person who is their near and dear ones is very necessary for disabled people. It helps them to live away from a stranger who may cause harm to them. This chart shows that 100% of disabled learners know their family members. It is essential for disabled people to know their kith and kin to live in a society, i.

Findings and Discussion in Terms of Research questions

1. Findings of the study show that the teachers use many kinds of instruments for the language learning of their disabled students.

These are puzzle sets, drawing books, blackboards, charts, and many other objects.

Students learn language by using these instruments according to their capabilities. The students also get the chance to choose their learning instruments according to their will. (Q.1 Section-1.5)

2. The parents give their support to the disabled children for language learning. They bring their children from afar and sit beside them until they get used to an unknown environment. Some parents try months after months to teach their children holding a pencil, sitting on the bench, learning a word.

But some different parents did not give proper attention to their disabled children's language learning. They did not bring them to school regularly, did not help them do their homework, and did not give enough time to their disabled children. For these reasons, the children lose their interest in language learning. (Q.2 section-1.5)

3. The teachers are well trained in the language learning of disabled children. They employ many strategies in a regular classroom to teach language to their disabled students.

They sit beside the students and give them classwork one by one according to the students' capability. They give time to their students to play for their recreation. Moreover, the teachers give homework to the students, which helps them learn the language more quickly. The teachers also use drawing books, textbooks, charts, blackboards to teach vocabulary. They rebuke them for their faults and appreciate them in their good things. (Q.3 Section 1.5)

4. The students get a chance to show their extra curriculum activities. They get an opportunity to participate in many kinds of competitions, like- art, essay, and Olympic Games.

Two of their students took part in the Olympic Games and won a bronze medal from this same school. These kinds of extra-curriculum activities help disabled students to learn a language more quickly. As they face many obligations and restrictions from society, these kinds of competition help them make their position in society. (Q.4 Section 1.5)

Conclusions

This study explores the language learning process of the disabled person and the present situation of Bangladeshi learners. This study also addresses how a learning process in school can improve the language learning process and communication skills. In the current context of Bangladesh, the process of language learning is under development. But the authority tried their best to develop the process of language learning of the disabled person. However, this study found evidence that the learners are trying harder to learn a language, and teachers also give their best to teach the learners. The researcher has found that the learners are very much conscious about their language learning. All the learners are not the same in their ability, so it is needed to make them feel comfortable in their learning area. The current works identified that the student is obtaining sufficient skills in terms of language and communication.

The researcher has faced some limitations while conducting the research. The researcher does not get enough time to complete her research. For time constraints, the researcher could not take more data from a larger population—moreover, time hindrances the researcher to gather more information and interpret the results timely. The researcher has faced limitations of financial budget in which good research is dependent.

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Biodata

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Using Stories in Presenting English Grammar to Vietnamese Young Learners

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: grammar teaching techniques, young learners, learning through stories

Despite the development of the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach in recent years, explicit grammar instruction remains an indispensable element in English teaching and learning and needs to be paid more attention to, especially when Vietnamese teachers are struggling at presenting grammar to young EFL learners. With an investigation into 5th-graders' grammar lessons delivered by native English-speaking teachers at Vietnam-Australia School, Hanoi, the research aims at (1) describing the way stories are employed in grammar lessons; (2) exploring teachers' beliefs and (3) students' opinions towards this technique. The research adopts a case study research design with various data collection instruments, including classroom observation, surveys, and semi-structured interviews. The result reveals that using stories is perceived to be effective in presenting grammar to young learners by both teachers and most students. It can inform both native and non-native English teachers of this technique's employment in grammar lessons and Vietnamese students' attitudes towards it.

Introduction

Teaching English as a foreign language for young learners has recently received much more attention from educators as a result of globalization and the increasing use of English as the international language. In the Vietnam context, under the National Foreign Languages 2020 Project, which has come into effect since 2008, it became compulsory for primary students to start learning English at third grade instead of beginning from secondary education. Moreover, after finishing primary schooling, students are expected to reach level 1 of the Common European Framework of References for languages (CEFR). Under the influence of that project, curriculum and methods in teaching English for primary learners have undergone changes; additionally, teachers' training has also been taken into consideration with national workshops held especially for English language teachers at primary schools.

Despite the growing interest in English teaching for young learners, much more research in the field is still required, as well as both pedagogy and methodology need to be developed for effective teaching (Cameron, 2001). There have not been so many studies conducted on young learners in Vietnam, which offers numerous unexplored areas for researchers to dig into. Among those are grammar teaching techniques, which play a crucial role in English teaching and learning, as grammar acts as a living resource that facilitates communication with others, rather than just a list of labels and rules (Scrivener, 1994).

Important as it is, teaching grammar to primary learners is not at all simple. Not all teachers are equipped with appropriate methods and resources to teach grammar to primary children. Moreover, the teachers' beliefs and young students' opinions about the techniques used to teach grammar may be dissimilar. Therefore, the research hopes to suggest a useful technique that can be used to present grammar to young learners and teachers as well as learners' attitudes towards this technique.

Literature review

The role of grammar teaching

During the last half-century, different approaches in English language teaching have appeared and contributed to the development of this field (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Among the approaches in English teaching in general and grammar teaching in particular, nowadays, CLT is favored by most language teachers and learners for its comprehensive knowledge and skills offering students. The CLT approach views language as the most important communicative tool (Brown, 2002). Many researchers recognized that grammar is one of the linguistic means in achieving those communicative goals (Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Nassaji, 2000; Spada & Lightbown, 1993). Therefore, teaching and learning grammar is necessary but not the ultimate goal of learning a language. Grammar just equips students with the basic and systematic knowledge of language so that they can base on and develop communicative competence. As pointed out by Nguyen et al. (2007), in current CLT classrooms, grammar is neither over-emphasized nor neglected, but it is regarded as an indispensable tool to develop learners' communicative competence. It was also argued by Pham and Tran (2021) that grammar is regarded as a key component of language and has a significant impact on the success of second language learning.

The practice of grammar teaching

Regarding grammar teaching, many scholars like Celce-Murcia and Hilles (1988), Larsen-Freeman (1991), and Thornbury (2006) have reached a consensus that the teaching of grammar needs to address three dimensions: Form, meaning, and use. Form is the way a particular structure is formed. Mastering form means knowing the formation of words and the order of words in that structure. This is undeniably important as it is essential for language learners to recognize and produce grammatically well-formed sentences (Thornbury, 2006). Meaning is

what is expressed through a structure. According to Thornbury (2006, p.4), “grammar is a process for making a speaker’s or a writer’s meaning clear when contextual information is lacking.” He suggested that since grammar is definitely a tool for making meaning, learners should pay attention to the Form and the meanings those forms convey. Use or function is the reason why a particular form is selected in a particular context. Several different forms can express one function, and one Form can express a variety of functions. In order to be successful in communication, learners should match Form and function well. Therefore, teaching grammar out of context is not recommended.

There are different opinions on what stages teaching grammar should include. Celce-Muria (1988) suggested that a grammar lesson should follow four steps: presentation, focused practice, communicative practice, teacher feedback, and correction. Ur (1988) also came up with four stages that share the same two with Celce-Muria: presentation and practice. He added an explanation step right after the presentation and test as the last stage. Both scholars’ suggestions have their own values; however, this research adopts a more familiar model of teaching grammar: presentation – practice – production, which is also the model that teachers from Vietnam-Australia School Hanoi follow when teaching grammar to 5th graders.

Presentation is the stage where grammar structures are introduced, either deductively or inductively. A good presentation, according to Leech et al. (1982, p.81), “should include both oral and written forms, and both form and meaning. It is important for learners to have plenty of contextualized examples of the structure and to understand them”. In other words, the presentation stage creates a context to help learners comprehend the meaning and use, explains the Form to help them remember, and finally, checks students’ understanding. A wide variety of techniques can be employed to present new grammatical items to learners: using stories, dialogues, and audio/ visual aids. As suggested by Shin and Candrall (2014), stories are most beneficial to young learners as they introduce new cultures, offer an entertaining way of learning, and help students develop critical thinking skills. Thornbury (2006) commented that introducing grammar in meaningful contexts will facilitate students’ understanding since they easily grasp the meaning and function. Situations can be authentic or created by teachers, as long as they are meaningful and can present new grammar well. Pictures, photographs, flashcards, realia, recordings, videos, and songs are also absolutely helpful in presenting grammar. They also help engage students, boost class atmosphere while maintaining the lesson’s effectiveness.

Teaching grammar to 5th-grade learners

Shin and Crandall (2014) offered a specific look at how children deal with learning a foreign language. First, young learners need a learning environment similar to the first language, as children are engaged and highly motivated to learn when they can see the connection between the language and the immediate needs in the real world. As a result, purposeful activities that “mirror first language acquisition” (p.40) are recommended. Second, as children learn language through lots of meaningful exposure and practice, the teacher had better provide plenty of meaningful and comprehensible input and chances to practice using English in class. Last but

not least, young learners do not learn language through explicit grammatical explanations. Instead, they “gain an understanding of the grammar implicitly through repetition and recycling of the language in different contexts” (p.41). Therefore, children should be exposed to language in authentic and meaningful contexts. Repetition and recycling are also encouraged to use to improve learners’ language competence.

Scholars widely agree that grammar actually has a place in children’s language learning and children have the ability to acquire grammatical items. The nativist view in language acquisition (revived by Chomsky, as cited in Brewster & Ellis, 2010) suggested that children have their pre-installed program to learn the language. They can speak and use grammatical structures very well despite being unable to explain why (Pinter, 2006). Cameron (2001) also shared the same viewpoint about the important role of grammar. She asserted that grammar indeed has a place in children’s foreign language learning as it is “closely tied into meaning and use of the language, and is interconnected with vocabulary” (p. 96). It requires “skillful teaching” from the teacher since grammar is not suggested to teach directly but through “opportunities for grammar learning that arise in the classroom” (p. 122).

Related studies

There has been a huge volume of research on teaching grammar by scholars worldwide and Vietnam in particular. For example, researchers in Vietnam National University (VNU) like Pham and Tran (2007) or Nguyen and Le (2010) have explored communicative approaches in teaching grammar in their research; however, the subject is high school students. Techniques in teaching grammar have already been studied in a thesis by Lam and Tran (2008) about the application of games in teaching grammar, also aiming at grade 10 students. Hence, teaching grammar to primary learners is yet investigated.

Likewise, in the field of teaching English to young learners, some VNU undergraduate students have contributed by investigating vocabulary teaching and group work exploitation. Du (2008) found out that grade 4th and 5th students preferred common activities used to teach vocabulary at an English teaching center and drew some implications for teachers when planning vocabulary lessons. With the same subjects chosen, the research of Bui (2011) studied how group work motivated students to learn English in the classroom. Nevertheless, the aspect of teaching grammar to young learners remains a gap to research on.

In the world, there has been some research on techniques to teach grammar for primary learners; however, these studies only present several techniques and suggest the way of using them but do not focus on using stories to present grammar. A study carried out recently by Senturk and Kahraman (2020) in Turkey revealed that the involvement of short stories in language lessons can enhance students’ grammar knowledge, but the subjects are middle school students. Therefore, through this study, the researcher hopes to suggest the steps to follow when using stories to present grammar to young learners in Vietnam, as well as teachers’ and the learners’ attitudes towards this technique.

Research Questions

The study aims at answering the following research questions:

1. How do native teachers use stories to present grammar to grade 5th English learners as observed by the researcher?
2. How do these teachers view this technique, in terms of their advantages and students' preference towards them?
3. What are 5th graders' attitudes towards this technique in grammar lessons?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

Vietnam-Australia School, Hanoi (VAS Hanoi) is a semi-international school offering a dual program to all students that include the Vietnamese curriculum together with an English-based program. The English language is put a great emphasis in the school curriculum since it seeks to raise students' ability in the four English language skills through continuous lessons with native English language teachers. For 5th graders, six out of eight English periods per week are instructed by native English language teachers. In the past, Australian teachers took charge of helping the students to develop key skills needed to communicate successfully in English, namely speaking, listening, reading, and writing, while Vietnamese English teachers supported them and specialized in teaching English grammar and vocabulary. However, this distribution is no longer implemented since it is best to integrate both skills and knowledge into English lessons. To put it another way, native English language teachers are currently delivering grammar lessons as well.

In terms of materials, Incredible English (second edition) is the program used. This material has such resources as flashcards, photocopiable masters, story frames book, and fun, lively stories written by popular children's story-writer Michaela Morgan. The book encourages learning other skills, such as working with others, learning how to learn, and to understand more about their own culture (VAS Hanoi website).

In relevance to each language level of primary pupils from Grade 1 to Grade 5, VAS Hanoi identifies a suitable book for each, which can be explained by Figure 1.

The research participants include two native

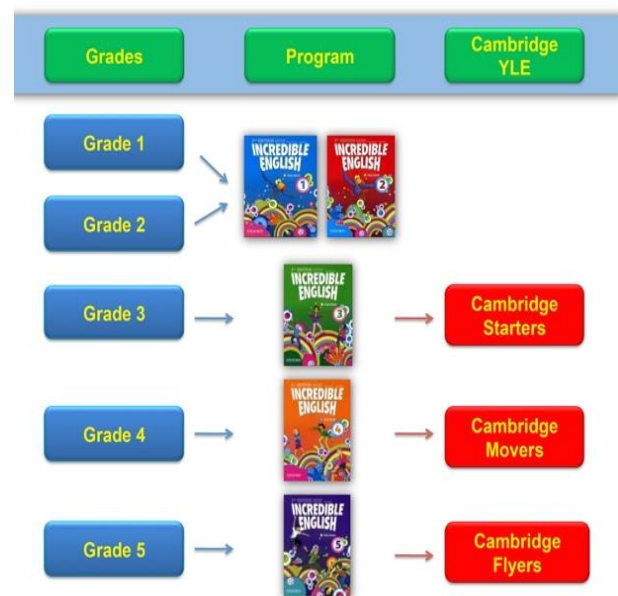


Figure 1. Programs used for primary pupils at VAS Hanoi

English-speaking teachers and 42 pupils at two Grade 5 classes. Both Australian teachers have qualifications in primary education with about 6-8 years of teaching experience. The researcher with the purpose observed their classes is to find out the technique used to present English grammar to the students. After several observations, they participated in semi-structured interviews to share their ways of delivering a grammar lesson and their beliefs towards the technique used. There are two 5th grade classes at VAS primary school, which were named differently in the research as 5A and 5B. There are 21 pupils in class 5A instructed by teacher A (T. A), while there are 20 pupils in class 5B instructed by teacher B (T. B). They responded to a survey designed by the researcher to discover their attitudes towards the technique used to present English grammar. It is believed that 5th graders are more mature cognitively and emotionally than the other ones. Thus, they were able to understand the questions better and give reasonable as well as critical answers. After participating in the survey, three students from each class will be chosen to join in an informal interview.

Design of the Study

The case study approach is adopted in this research. Yin (1984, p.23) defines the case study approach as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used." Likewise, Gall et al.(1996) clarified that a case study helps investigators produce in-depth research of examples of a phenomenon in its natural circumstances and from the participants' views involved in the phenomenon. In the case of second language research, a case study aims to provide a comprehensive description of language learning or use within a specific population and settings (Mackey & Gass, 2005). As Johnson (1993) claimed, it is highly appreciated for "providing insights into the complexities of particular cases in their particular contexts" (cited in Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 172). In other words, a case study can offer the researchers an intensive analysis of an individual unit in a specific real-life context. Since the research seeks to investigate grammar teaching techniques used by native English-speaking teachers in a particular educational setting; hence, a case study is the most suitable research design to adopt. It is believed that thanks to data collected from various instruments case study offers, the findings of the research could be significant to later research. In order to increase the validity and reliability of the case study, a combination of observation, interview, and questionnaire is exploited during the research process.

Data collection & analysis

The data collection procedure involves four phases which are described as the following. The first step was observing two Grade, five classes. Due to the time limit, observation could only take place four times in each class. During the observation, the researcher tried to take note of the technique used and inquiries about the method that needed further explanation from the teacher. After finishing observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two teachers to verify the researcher's subjective observation (if any) and understand their beliefs towards the grammar presentation technique they used. The third phase involved a questionnaire on learners of two classes to identify their attitudes towards the technique used.

This questionnaire was designed based on the data collected from observation and interviews with the teachers. It was made up of scale-ranking questions to easily transform the data collected into statistics, tables, and charts. The questionnaire was written in Vietnamese, and they were delivered to students of each class during the ten last minutes of their English lesson, different from the sessions observed by the researcher. Thanks to the two teachers' generous help, the researcher had enough time to instruct and explain clearly to the students how to do the questionnaire and make sure there were no misunderstandings. When the students had trouble understanding a question, the researcher could immediately give a hand so that they could give the best answers. In a closer look, the questionnaire was divided into two parts with 06 questions in total. The first part included 03 questions asking the children about their personal information. The second part asked the pupils specifically their opinions of the grammar presentation technique used by native English-speaking teachers in grammar lessons with scale-rating questions. Their attitudes can be understood as: to what extent they like the technique and to what extent they think the technique is interesting and effective. The fourth step was informal interviews to understand more about the students' answers. Three students from each class who had interesting answers from the survey were chosen to participate in the interview. Each interview lasted for about 7 minutes.

As the data of the research were collected through three different instruments, a variety of methods could be employed to analyze them. To begin with, the qualitative content analysis method was used to analyze the data collected from the observation and interview. The observation and interview notes could provide a great deal of information, and tape recordings were transcribed to offer the most complete and profound set of information. Then, the whole data was classified, synthesized, and coded to interpret findings. Answers expressing the same ideas would be paraphrased to be in a pattern, which helped the researcher make inferences and then later wrote up a detailed description of methods used and the teachers' attitudes towards them. Later, descriptive statistical analysis was employed to analyze the data collected from the questionnaire. Both qualitative content and descriptive statistical analysis method could bring the researcher a thorough and profound analysis of the data so those valid findings can be reached.

Findings and discussion

Using stories to present stories

The researcher's observation and teachers' interview results reveal that most grammar lessons start with a story. Both teachers shared quite a similar way to approach the story: after having the students listen to the story, they asked questions and explained some vocabulary to clarify the story's content before presenting the grammatical structures. However, the amount of time spent on dealing with the story was different between the two cases. For example, with the same story *Mrs. Midge's famous pies* (Incredible English 5 – Class book, p. 46), while teacher B needed nearly half of a lesson (30 minutes) to play the story over again, teacher A only let the

students listen to it once before explaining and presenting grammar.

Table 1. Steps to explain stories in two classes

Class 5A– Teacher A	Class 5B – Teacher B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tasked Ss to open their books to page 46 and look at the story - T played the story once - T called some Ss to read out loud the narration and dialogues in each picture. - After each picture was read, T explained structures and vocabulary. For example, he asked questions: “What does this mean by ‘How much does it weigh?’ here?” “What is ‘recipe?’” “Do you know what does this mean by ‘ingredients?’” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tasked Ss to close their books and guess the name of the story - Ss listened to the story once - Tasked such simple questions about the story as "Who is Mrs. Midge?"; "What does she do?"; "What does she make?" "Why do the students come to her restaurant?" Not all questions were fully answered by the Ss. - Ss listened to the story for the second time while opening the books - T tried to retell the story in detail. He said: “So Mrs. Midget is a baker. She is going to make a chicken pie. Do you remember what she needs to make a pie?” Ss reply “Onions!” – “Onions, yes, anything else?” – “Flour!” “Yes, flour...” - Ss listened to the story for the third time. - Tasked, "Any questions?" "Any words that you can't understand?" and explained the words "recipe" and "ingredients" - T played the cartoon (story on-screen) twice - Ss worked in pairs, read the story to their partners while T went around and asked questions about the story to check understanding.

One possible explanation for this dissimilarity is the disparity in English competence between two classes, as shared by the teachers and observed by the researcher. Class 5A is known to have better English ability than class 5B; thus it took them a shorter time to get the gist of the story. As a matter of fact, from observation, the researcher also realizes that only after three times listening to the story could help the students from group 5B answer most of the teacher's questions, whereas 5A students were able to answer all the teacher's questions right after one time listening. However, it was not guaranteed that all the students from group 5A could fully understand the story as there were only some familiar faces that frequently raised their voices in reply to the teacher's questions. In other words, the activity seemed not able to involve all students, though the teacher tried to call different students for each question. To explain why he did not spend so much time reading the story, teacher A shared:

“Using stories takes time, sometimes there're additional pieces of vocabulary or concepts that I need to explain. I mean, you're testing different skills, the kids are listening and reading the story, but the focus is not reading; it's the grammar, so you don't want them to get lost too much in the story". (T. A)

Meanwhile, thanks to the pair work and teacher B's supervision, the story might be fully

understood by all students of group 5B.

Another factor affecting the time allotment for stories was their level of difficulty, as shared by teacher B. He said:

“There are some stories that are more difficult, for example, Ancient Egypt, which is just too far away and too much vocabulary. They take more time for the students to understand”. (T. B)

Even though there was a difference in the time spent on stories, both teachers agreed that after discussing the story and ensuring that there was no concept unfamiliar to the students, they would move to talk about grammar. In this case, they moved to task 2 (Incredible English 5, class book, p.47) where sample sentences of the targeted grammatical structures (too many, too much, enough) were presented. They asked students to read the samples and find similar sentences in the story, for instance: “We haven’t got enough onions” and “You’ve got too much flour”. By looking at the pictures and context, students then could somehow understand the meaning of such sentences. At that time, both teachers went on explaining those structures by giving examples and writing on the board. Since two teachers’ ways of presenting grammar at this point bore much resemblance, the researcher will only demonstrate teacher A’s talk.

Teacher A: These structures help us to talk about what do we need and what have we got, OK? For example, we need 6 apples (wrote number “6”) and we have 10 (wrote number “10” below number “6”). Who can make a sentence similar to the sample sentences?

Student 1: We’ve got too many apples.

Teacher A: (drew two columns: “countable” and “uncountable”) So, is “apple” countable? Can we count “apple”? Can we say “one apple”, “two apples”, “three apples”?

Students: Yes.

Teacher A: Yes, “apple” is countable (wrote “apple” in the column “countable”). So we have the sentence “We’ve got too many apples” (wrote “many” on the top of the column). This time, we need 10 apples, but we only have 6 apples. How can we say?

Student 2: We haven’t got enough apples!

Teacher A: Correct! What about “uncountable”? (pointed to the “uncountable” column) Is this different or the same? Who can give me some uncountable ingredients?

Students: Flour... Sugar...

Teacher A: So flour (wrote “flour” in the “uncountable” column), I have 6 kilos of flour. I only need 5 kilos. So...?

Students: I’ve got too much flour.

Teacher A: (wrote “much” on the top of “uncountable” column) How about I need 6 but I only have 5 kilos of sugar?

Students: I haven’t got enough sugar!

Teacher A: That's right, so it's the same for "enough"! (pointed to two columns respectively)

In short, although the amount of time spent on working with the stories may vary due to the difference in students' level and the stories' difficulty, the usual procedure of exploiting stories to present grammar still can be affirmed in teacher B's sharing:

"First, we introduce the story, we talk about the story, we try to answer the questions about the story. Once the children have the understanding what the story is about, we move to the grammar". (T. B)

Teachers' belief

Both teachers reached a consensus that the stories provide context for the students to understand grammar better and keep them excited during the lesson. According to teacher B, it is challenging if we teach grammar without context in the stories since "they give children an idea of how we use the language and why we use it." Similarly, teacher A asserted that using stories has a huge advantage, which is helping students to see grammar in action, in context so that they could make their own connections to the world outside, as he believed that one of the teachers' important jobs is to help the children relate themselves to real life. He added, "Everything in life is better taught by examples, and the stories help provide examples". In other words, two teachers hold the belief that stories offer context, where the students can understand how and why we use the grammar or sentence structures in real-life situations, thus making teaching and learning grammar less difficult.

Another advantage of using stories shared by both teachers is the exciting atmosphere it can bring to the classroom. Compared to the "not much fun" traditional way of presenting grammar, stories can keep both the teacher and students more excited, commented by teacher A. He gave an example:

"The students get to look at the story and something that interests them, so I think that's a huge advantage. We don't have to just say "Well, today we are going to learn too much, too many, here it is, it's on the board, now copy this to your book", it's not much fun. For example, the story about making a pie, kids would like to make a pie. We can talk a lot about that, and we can do a lot of interesting things about making pies". (T. A)

Teacher B supported this idea by pointing out that since the stories are engaging to the students, they would want to learn more and more, using them can make both teaching and learning easier. The lessons even stand a high chance of becoming boring without the presence of stories, said teacher B, since "some students would not understand what we are trying to do".

In conclusion, it is a shared viewpoint between two teachers that using stories helps the children understand and relate the grammar to the real use better through its context. Moreover, stories make both teaching and learning more interesting. Thus students do enjoy working with stories in grammar lessons. This is similar to Shin and Crandall (2014)'s ideas about how children learn the language, which is presented in the literature review section: children learn through meaningful exposure to the language; moreover, they are engaged when they can see the

connection between the language and real-life context.

Students' attitudes

To discover students' attitudes towards the exploitation of stories to present grammar, the researcher asked all students from the two classes to express their level of agreement to three statements: (1) I like learning grammar through stories; (2) I think learning grammar through stories is interesting; (3) I think learning grammar through stories is effective.

Students' preference for learning grammar through stories can be expressed through responses to the statement (1), which is visualized in Figure 2. Their opinions of whether learning grammar through stories is interesting and effective or not are also presented in Table 2 below.

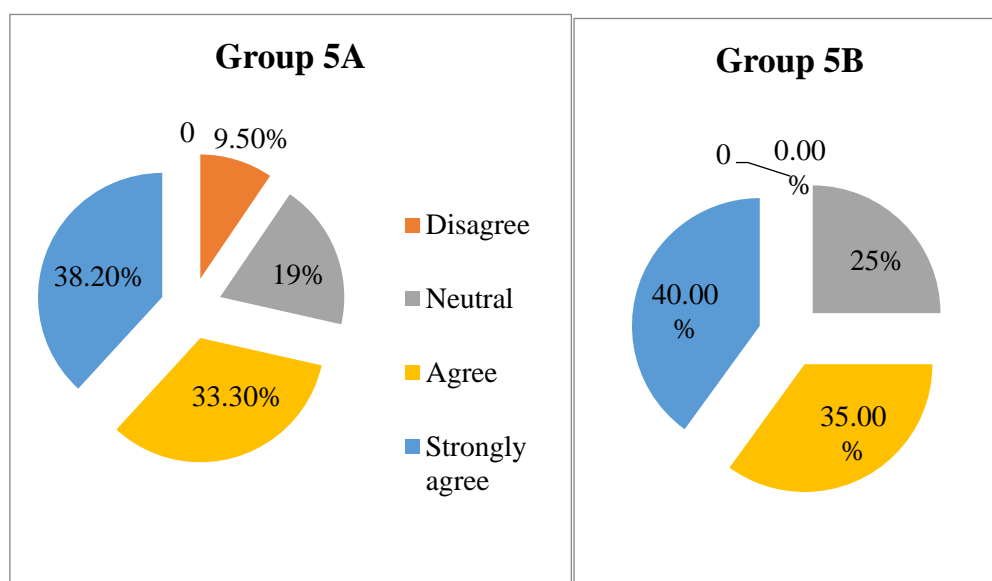


Figure 2. Students' response to the statement "I like learning grammar through stories"

Table 2. Students' opinions of learning grammar through stories

		Group 5A	Group 5B
2	I think learning grammar through stories is interesting.	3.95	4.15
3	I think learning grammar through stories is effective.	3.90	3.75

As illustrated in Figure 2, a very large proportion of students (72% in class 5A and 75% in class 5B) have an interest in learning grammar through stories. Moreover, it is a widely held belief among 5th graders that learning grammar through stories is both interesting and effective, with an average rating above 3.75 for two questions in both classes. According to four interviewed students, two from class 5A and two from class 5B, stories make the lessons more exciting as they offer the chance to look at beautiful pictures or even cartoons on the screen:

"I pretty like the stories because the pictures look nice, and the teacher sometimes lets us watch the cartoon." (S. A1)

Stories also feature different characters, thus making the students want to discover and explore more. In addition, all of them admit that they can understand sentence structures very quickly and remember them through stories.

"Because when I look at the pictures, I already understand the context, so I can understand the sentences easily." (S. B1)

Although no one strongly dislikes learning grammar through stories, a small percentage of students do not perceive using stories to learn grammar as their favorite. Four students of class 5A and five students of class 5B choose "neutral" for the question, and most noticeably, two students of class 5A disagree with the statement "I like learning grammar through stories." When being asked about the reasons for not being fond of this technique, a student from 5A explained that the content of some stories is quite boring to him; as a result, he does not fancy reading those stories. Another student from 5B also admitted that sometimes he felt bored since either his mother had already taught him those stories at home, or he had already read similar stories elsewhere. In both cases, despite not having an interest in learning grammar through stories, they still regard this technique as an effective way to present and learn grammar.

In a nutshell, using stories is the most commonly used technique to present grammar to grade 5 students in VAS Hanoi for two main reasons: it brings context and keeps both teachers and students excited. Although most students are interested in learning through stories, which is similar to the teachers' beliefs and expectations, there are still some children not engaged by this technique.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to examine the technique used to present grammar to grade 5th students by native English – speaking teachers at VAS Hanoi, with an attempt to answer three research questions: (1) how the stories are used to present grammar, (2) how the teachers view the technique in terms of its advantages and the students' preference towards it, (3) what the students' attitudes towards the technique used are. Observation, questionnaires, and interviews are the instruments utilized to collect the data needed for the research.

It is revealed that in the presentation stage, the most frequently utilized technique is using stories since it has such advantages as bringing real-life context to the classroom and keeping both teachers and students excited, as approved by both teachers. The story should be played first and discussed later. After the children get the gist of the story, sentence structures are presented. This technique also receives positive attitudes from the students as the teachers expect, though there are still some children not engaged due to the lack of originality in the stories' content.

The findings of this study coincide with the results of a study by Senturk and Kahraman (2020) with Turkish middle school students. It is suggested that most students enjoy the inclusion of short stories in their lessons, which contribute to the students' successful language acquisition.

From the results found in this study, native English-speaking teachers' technique to present

grammar to 5th graders in VAS Hanoi, their beliefs, and the student's attitude towards it might act as a reference for other teachers working in the Vietnamese context. Understanding the benefits of using stories in grammar presentations and how students feel about them will probably better prepare teachers for planning grammar lessons so that teaching and learning grammar can be more engaging and effective. Particularly, exploiting stories can be a good way to present grammar. Extra vocabulary should be introduced alongside so that students can understand the story's content before looking at the grammar patterns. However, careful consideration should be taken when teachers choose the stories so that they best suit students' English level, characteristics and interests. The amount of time spent on discussing stories also varies corresponding to the story's level of difficulty and students' reading ability.

Despite the researcher's strong desire to investigate the techniques used by native English – speaking teachers in VAS Hanoi, some difficulties encountered during research time led to several limitations. In the first place, as a result of the researcher's lack of time, a limited number of observations were done. With only four sessions for each class, the data presented may not fully reflect all the techniques used in grammar lessons of VAS Hanoi's teachers. Another consequence of the time shortage is the limited chance to interview the students. There are 41 students participating in the survey in total. However, the researcher only managed to talk to 6 pupils, 3 from 5A and 3 from 5B. The opinions of these students might not represent all the students in their class. Moreover, each interview only lasts for 10 minutes, which can restrict students' further explanation for some questions.

The study's limitations give rise to numerous suggestions for further research. The issue may be dug deeper into by requiring more observations and face-to-face interviews with the students so that the whole picture can be described thoroughly and the results may become more reliable. Another direction is to conduct research with the same topic but in another setting. The setting may be a public primary school and the subjects may be non-native English-speaking teachers. In addition, a comparative study between techniques used by native English-speaking teachers and non-native English-speaking teachers is also a possible recommendation for later research.

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Biodata

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The English-majored Students' Practices of Mind Maps in Writing Skills

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: Mind maps; occurrence; perceptions; phases; writing skills.

Writing is one of the two productive and four vital skills in acquiring any foreign language. Therefore, it is necessary for language educators, teachers, linguists, and learners to make use of a wide range of different methods to enhance all four English skills for language learners. The researchers have the assumption that using the mind mapping technique positively influences the improvement of this productive skill for the first-year students at the Faculty of English, University of Foreign Language Studies – The University of Danang. The purposes of this article entitled “*The English-majored Students' Practices of Mind Maps in Writing Skills*” are to investigate the practices of mind maps related to the rate of occurrence, the phases in writing, and the perceptions of first-year students when taking advantage of mind maps to boost their writing skill. This research is quantitatively and qualitatively carried out, which gathered information from three research instruments: classroom observation, interviews, and questionnaires for freshmen students. The assumption of the researchers was proved to be correct since the first-year students advocated the effectiveness of mind maps in writing skills at different rates and often used mind maps during the pre-writing stage.

Introduction

In the era of globalization and integration among nations in the world, improving English language teaching and learning in all school levels, namely primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels, has always been the aim of the Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam. At Faculty of English, University of Foreign Language Studies – The University of Danang (FE, UFLS - UD), for graduation, senior students must hand in the English language certificates, namely Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), International English Language Testing System (IELTS), or Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency

(VSTEP). To be more specific, they must earn an overall band of at least 8.5 points out of ten, which corresponds to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level C1. At UFLS-UD, first-year FE students have to study the integrated skills of two receptive and other two productive skills in the Preliminary English Test (PET) exam format.

Understanding the significance of writing ability in particular, as well as four English skills in general, lecturers at UFLS – UD have been seeking a wide variety of teaching methodologies, applying them, and doing action research in classrooms in order to give students highly-motivating lectures to not only get the graduation certificate in the short-term plan but also enhance their English language skills in long-term use. According to Rao (2007), writing skills help learners encourage thinking and analyzing skills, organize ideas, and summarize ideas; therefore, there is no shadow of a doubt that writing plays a crucial part in acquiring a foreign language.

The obstacles that most of the students during their first academic school year at FE, UFLS-UD encountered in writing skills could be the word limit of the writing tasks, the inability to identify what writing approaches should be utilized to a particular writing task type, the lack of lexical resource, and the shortage of writing ideas. To solve the last two aforementioned problems, mind maps were considered to be used by the researchers. It is widely advocated that many papers have looked into the usage of mind maps; however, it seems that no study has looked into the application of mind maps in the writing skills of UFLS English-majored students. The article “*The English-majored Students’ Practices of Mind Maps in Writing Skills*” was conducted for the reasons above.

Literature review

Writing skills, as claimed by Meyers (2005), are important language skills. According to Byrne (1979) and Richards (1990), writing skills use symbols consisting of alphabetical letters, punctuations, and spaces to form words, sentences, stories, essays, or articles. According to White (1994), writing skills are believed to be an essential skill in learning English as a foreign language and the most challenging to be acquired by language learners since it involves different skills and conventions. Kepner (1991) points out that when practicing writing skills, learners often make many mistakes, namely spelling, the lack of idea extension, the shortage of vocabulary, and grammatical mistakes. However, Kepner (1991) also suggests two ways to improve learners' accuracy in writing skills. The first and foremost is the ability to learn sentence structures. Additionally, the support of language teachers also plays an important role in enhancing learners' writing skills. For instance, after they finish their writing, correction and feedback from the teachers are extremely necessary for their writing skills improvement. Therefore, suitable strategies which comprise of smartphones and portable devices, blog-based peer response, self-regulated learning strategies, and computers supported reasoning mapping as suggested in Le (2021), Pham and Usaha (2009), Tran (2021), and Elsegood and Rahimi (2009), respectively should be applied to acquire this skill efficiently. These researchers

advocate the effectiveness of such techniques in improving their students' writing performances.

Many researchers (Ahangari& Behzady, 2011; Budd, 2004; Buzan, 2006, 2007; De Porter, 2008; Lee, 2010) share common views towards the efficacy of mind mapping techniques in writing skills. Relating mind maps, Tony Buzan is the creator of this learning method, which dates back to the late 1960s. According to Buzan (2007), mind mapping is "a creative thinking device that represents normal work brain." (p.68). As could be understood from his definition, constructing a mind map is similar to how the brain works. Supporting concepts can radiate outward on several branches of the map, with the keyword or theme in the center. When used with written content, mind maps are regarded as an efficient strategy in learning a foreign language. Buzan (2006) also states that a mind map is a visual tool that language learners can utilize to think and generate ideas by taking notes and developing notions and opinions. It works by combining data from various sources and showing it as keywords in a vibrant, colorful manner. Because two hemispheres of the brain are stimulated, Budd (2004) and De Porter (2008) concur that this strategy can assist learners in generating and extending ideas, as well as trigger memories. Mind maps can help language learners naturally express their thoughts and build associations between concepts and words in this way. Hence, there is a high possibility that it is beneficial for first-year English-majored students to use this method to develop their writing skills. A mind map is, indeed, considered a helpful strategy for language-majored learners since it has been shown to improve learners' writing skills significantly, make the writing process thorough and meaningful, and assist learners in communicating their thoughts effectively. Despite disparities in geographical locations and teaching-learning environments, mind maps can help students improve their English acquisition in general and their writing ability in particular (Ahangari& Behzady, 2011; Lee, 2010).

Research Aims

The aims of this research are to investigate the practices of using mind maps by English-majored first-year students at FE, UFLS – UD, which include the occurrence, writing phases, and perceptions.

Research Questions

The researchers carried out this study to answer three research questions:

1. How often do English-majored first-year students use mind maps in writing skills??
2. What phases in a writing lesson do English-majored first-year students use mind maps?
3. What are the perceptions of English-majored first-year students on the use of mind maps in writing skills?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting and Participants

There are eight faculties at UFLS-UD. The Faculty of English has gained an essential role in training and providing resources for competent language users and meeting the need of researching, learning, and using English in the local regions and others. There are two semesters of a whole academic school year, and each semester comprises 15 weeks. At FE, there are two majors, namely English Translation and Interpreting and English Communications, in which the latter has just commenced this academic school year of 2021-2022. In this study, the researchers invited 240 English-majored first-year students in the former major. The participants aged from 18 to 21, and 50% of them have been studying this language for ten years. More than 120 first-year students who live in big cities in Vietnam start learning English at the age of 5 or 6 years old, and the rest have been learning English officially at grade 3 of primary schools when they are nine years old.

The core teaching curriculum compiled for first-year students at FE is at the intermediate level or CEFR level B1; therefore, FE has been using two commercial books named “Solution – Pre Intermediate” and “PET Result” of the publishing house of Oxford University Press for over ten years. The former is for General English (GE)-B1.1 and GE-B1.3 and is written by Tim Falla and Paul A Davies, while the latter is for GE-B1.2 and GE-B1.4 and is written by Jenny Quintana.

Table 1. Textbooks and participants

Time	Classes	Quantity	Subjects	Textbooks
Semester I August 2019 - December 2019	19CNA05	40	GE-B1.1	Unit 1– Unit 5 Solution: Pre-Intermediate
	19CNA07	38		
	19CNA08	42		
Semester II January 2020 - May 2021	19CNA11	39	GE-B1.4	Unit 7 – Unit 12 PET Result
	19CNA10	41		
	19CNA03	40		

As evidently seen from table 1, these first-year students had finished their first academic school years of 2019-2020 at UFLS - UD; and were meant to achieve level 3, which corresponded to CEFR test level B1. There were 240 first-year students in 6 different classes consisting of 19CNA05, 19CNA07, 19CNA08, 19CNA11, 19CNA10, and 19CNA03. The three classes of 19CNA05, 19CNA07, and 19CNA08 studied GE-B1.1 making up from unit 1 to unit 5 of Solution: Pre-Intermediate in the semester I from August 2019 to December 2019. In semester II from January 2020 to May 2021, the three remaining classes took the course of GE-B1.4, including the last six units of PET Result.

Data Collection and Analysis

To gain data sufficiently and effectively about the practice of mind maps in writing skills by English-majored first-year students at FE, a set of questionnaires and the interviews for first-year students conducted at the 15th week of each semester which is also the last week of every semester. The researchers also conducted the observation in writing classrooms during the 15 weeks of each semester. These three aforementioned research instruments were chosen as the research instruments to collect data for this research.

Initially, a sheet of classroom observation was designed and for the researchers to have an overview of the practice of mind maps in writing skills by English-majored first-year students. The observation during the academic years of 2019-2020 took place in writing classrooms with direct interaction among the researchers and students where offline classes were still in progress.

Secondly, the researchers wrote a set of questionnaires with both closed and open-ended questions. Specifically, the first part has two questions about the range of first-year students' age and their English learning duration; whereas, the second part consists of five questions which concern the frequency, the phases of a writing lesson, and the perceptions of first-year students on the practice of mind map to improve their writing skills. At the end of semester I, this set of questionnaires was uploaded to Google Drive, which subsequently released a link for the researchers. The researchers sent this link to six different classes via Messenger or Zalo in order to gather information for analysis.

At last, the researchers carried out interviews which aimed to support what the researchers observed. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the end of each offline semester. Since 240 first-year students took part in the interview, the researchers had 240 interviews at a time.

To answer three research questions, data from questionnaires, interviews, and observation were examined quantitatively and qualitatively. The researchers recognized and categorized the data into three groups of instruments after it was collected. The data from the interview, questionnaires, and observation were subsequently demonstrated in percentages and accompanied by charts, figures, and tables thanks to the support of Excel software. The research question of the occurrence of mind maps in EFL writing skills was answered thanks to the use of questionnaires. In order to investigate at which stages in writing lessons first-year students utilize mind maps, the researchers made use of classroom observations, interviews, and questionnaires. The last question of the perceptions of first-year students on mind maps in writing skills was found by using all three instruments as aforementioned. Based on this quantitative analysis, the researchers discussed the results and suggested some implications for English-majored first-year students at FE, UFLS-UD to better use mind maps in writing skills.

Findings and Discussion

Occurrence of Mind Maps in Writing Skills

What should be highlighted from figure 1 is that none of the students always or never utilized mind maps in EFL writing classes. This result could be possibly originated from the challenges that they faced when drawing mind maps, namely students' inability to identify the main and minor content of a writing requirement, the time duration to draw a mind map, the lack of lexical resources, and their terrible drawing skills.

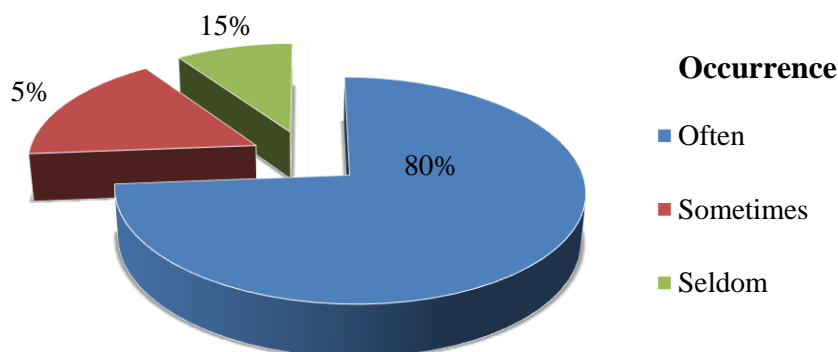


Figure 1. *Occurrence of Mind Maps in Writing Skills*

On the other hand, this table also revealed that 177 students out of 240 occupying 73.75% often made use of mind maps because mind maps might assist them in brainstorming lexical resources and generating writing ideas by making a connection among primary ideas with supplement ones. Only 40 (16.67%) and 23 (9.58%) students sometimes and seldom utilized this learning method, respectively which were roughly 4.5 and more than 7.5 times lower than the often used percentage at 73.75%. These difficulties synthesized from interview and observation caused the fact that students felt demotivated always to use this method; however, the fact that there were no students who never used this technique, a minority of them who sometimes and seldom utilized it, and the majority who often took advantage of it clarified the reason why mind maps were useful for first-year students in their EFL writing classes.

Writing Phases of Using Mind Maps

When conducting an EFL writing lesson, there are three phases, namely pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing. To investigate the writing phases where first-year students at FE, UFLS – UD drew mind maps, the researchers conducted observations, interviews, and a set of questionnaires to gather data.

The results from observations of the researchers and students' interviews showed that the first-year students mostly took advantage of mind maps before they started to do their writing tasks;

meanwhile, the occurrence of this technique at the while-writing phase hit bottom. The writing tasks in the two officially-used teaching materials for English-majored first-year students involve writing formal letters to apply for a job or request information, informal emails to relatives or friends to apologize for mistakes, short stories, and film reviews.

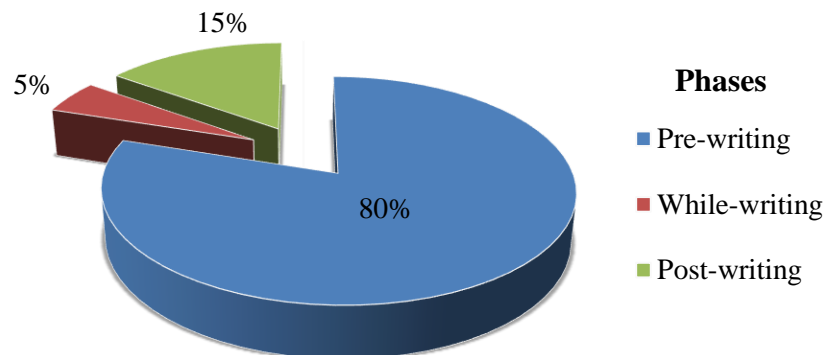


Figure 2. Writing Phases of Using Mind Maps

The results from questionnaires considered to be the last data collection instrument in this study could be apparently depicted in figure 2 above. This technique ranked the top by EFL students at the pre-writing stage at exactly 80%, which was more than fivefold compared to the second most used stage of post-writing at 15% and 16 fold as opposed to the least used stage of while-writing at precisely 5%. The percentage of using mind maps occurred in every stage of a writing lesson could be inferred that this technique was useful to help them develop this skill. To make it more specific, before first-year students started to achieve their writing tasks, they often drew a mind map to list lexical resources which had relevance to the topic of writing requirements. According to them, post-writing ranked the second since they had a tendency to use the mind mapping technique to cover more theme-related new words and supporting ideas from their peer writing papers to review for their later writing test easily. While they were writing their papers, they created mind maps if they lost the terminology or ideas. It could be possibly stated that mind maps were used at different rates and at different phases of writing instruction.

English-majored Students' Perceptions on Mind Maps in Writing Skills

The researchers discovered students' perceptions of the efficaciousness of this learning method in EFL writing classes by classroom observation, interviews, and questionnaires.



Image 1. English-major Students Using Mind Maps in Writing Skills

Thanks to the first two data collection of classroom observation and interviews, the majority of students expressed an interest in creating mind maps to improve their writing skills, as shown in image two since the enhancement in their writing skills was evidently reported by marks given by lecturers for writing assessment at the end of each semester. Another reason that should be taken into consideration was traced back to the fact that they might establish a logical sequence for more coherent ideas in their writing papers by learning additional topic vocabulary. There was no record concerning the idea that the mind mapping technique was not beneficial.

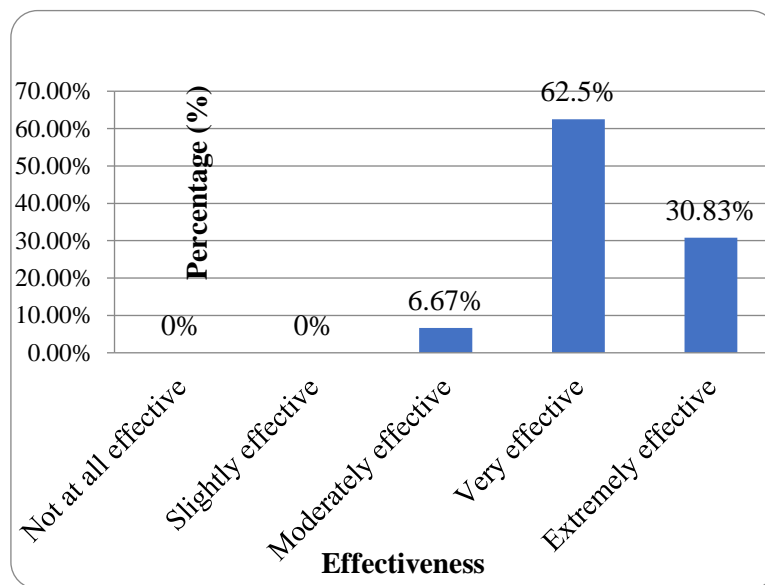


Figure 3. Students' Perceptions on Effectiveness of Mind Maps in Writing Skills

Looking at the column chart of figure 3 in greater detail, with 62.5% of "very effective" voters, 30.83% of "very effective" voters, and 6.67% of "moderately effective" voters, 100% of EFL first-year students valued using this strategy to improve their writing skills. No participants denied the efficacy of this technique since 0% was seen by the "slightly effective" and "not at all effective" voters. In summary, the analysis of such proportion reaffirmed the efficiency of using mind maps to boost first-year students' writing skills in EFL classes at FE, UFLS – UD.

Conclusion

To sum up, this work addressed the three research questions on the occurrence, writing phases, and students' views toward the usage of mind mapping technique in writing skills of English-major students in their first year at FE, UFLS – UD during the academic school years 2019-2020.

In terms of the occurrence of mind maps in EFL writing classes, a remarkable differentiation among the occurrence, namely "always," "often," "sometimes," "rarely," and "never," was recorded. The most easily recognized belonged to the choice of "often" as their learning method in their writing classes. Since the obstacles students had to confront when utilizing mind maps included the lack of lexical resources, the bad skills of mind map drawing, the inability to generate primary and supplement ideas, and time duration to draw a mind map, mind maps were neither always nor never drawn by the first-year students at FE, UFLS - UD.

Regarding the writing phases, before starting to write a particular task required by their lecturers, first-year students tended to draw mind maps to make a list of related-topic vocabulary and establish a coherent chain of ideas. The stage of post-writing stood at the second and was followed by the while-writing phase. When it came to writing exercises that needed them to work alone, first-year students tended to develop thought maps. When it came to writing activities in pairs, mind maps were used less than individual work.

Regarding first-year students' perceptions on the efficacy of mind maps in EFL writing classes, first-year students stated this technique's effectiveness at different levels with positive opinions.

Suggestions

Image 1, drawn by a group of first-year students in their presentation periods at FE, UFLS-UD, set an example of a standardized mind map as suggested by Buzan; however, it took first-year students a great amount of time to draw since there should be pictures to illustrate their ideas, and color to make the mind map eye-catching.



Image 2. A Model Mind Map Drawn by First-Year Students at FE, UFLS -UD

The researchers recommended a model of a less complicated mind map compared to the original one by Buzan, as illustrated in figure 4. Students can make use of this mind map model and apply it in EFL writing classes with the hope to shorten the drawing time length. It is highly believed that students do not have to spend such much time coloring and drawing images for mind maps since there is no image or color embedded in this simplified mind map model.

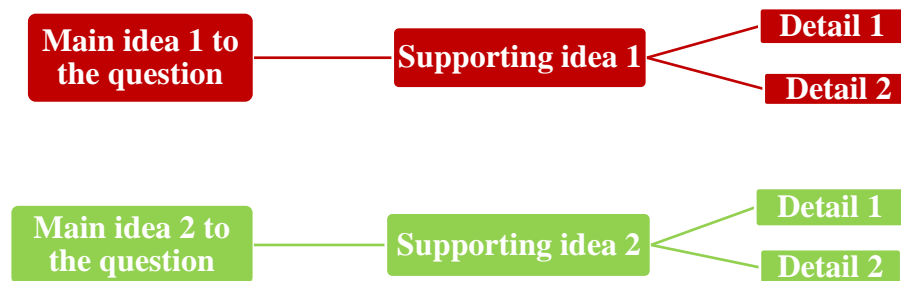


Figure 4. A Model of Simplified Mind Map

Figure 5 sets an example of the simplified mind maps drawn by first-year students at FE, UFLS – UD. For instance, to write down a paragraph of leisure activities, English-majored students fill in two boxes of the main ideas with "Read" and "Listen 2 music". Subsequently, to generate main ideas, students have to think of the supporting ideas by raising other questions related to the main ideas such as "Where do you read?" and "Why do you listen to music?". After thinking the two supplement questions, students add in the supporting idea 1 box with "library", and supporting idea 2 box with "balance life + spirits". The "library" box will be extended by the replacement of detail 1 and 2 boxes. Specifically, detail 1 box is substituted by "quiet" and detail 2 box is added by "variety". The branch of "balance life + spirits", "work load" and "1-2 hours" are the two supporting ideas.

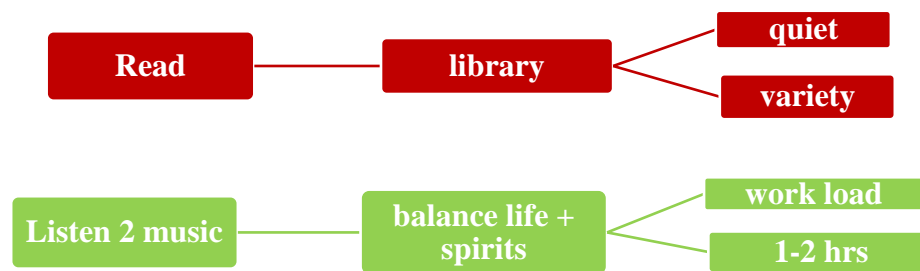


Figure 5. A Simplified Mind Map in Writing Skills Drawn by Students

Whenever first-year students finish their mind map drawings for vocabulary and ideas, they begin to write to fulfill their writing task. A writing paragraph is generated by an English-major first-year students with the support of the mind map in figure 5 this student draws.

Reading books and listening to music are my leisure activities. In terms of reading books, I like reading books in the library at my university campus. Initially, the atmosphere there is very ideal for reading because all the students have to keep quiet. Hence, I could absolutely concentrate on my reading. Furthermore, a great number of materials and references are well-organized on shelves which make it not challenging to search for. Also, books about general knowledge are easy to get access to. Additionally, listening to melodic rhythms is one of my hobbies which helps me balance my life and my spirits. I am now an English-major freshman at Faculty of English, University of Foreign Language Studies – The University of Danang; then I have a lot of workload which makes me sometimes feel stressed. I usually spend 1 to 2 hours a day listening to music when having free time, or at the same time studying and listening to music makes me less stressed. These are two free time activities I am keen on the most.

After students accomplish their writing performances, they have to work in pair for peer correction. At the following step, thanks to the peer correction, they have accomplish their final draft before submitting it to lecturers. Their lecturers subsequently assess students' writing papers by giving feedbacks and making comments via emails or face-to-face conversations in writing classes.

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Biodata

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