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## *A Note from the Editor-in-Chief*

Dear authors and colleagues,

It is our great pleasure to inform you that the issue in February 2022 of the International Journal of TESOL & Education (ijte) has completed its mission. We got contributions of authors from 7 different countries, such as Japan, Sweden, the Philippines, Thailand, Taiwan, Egypt, and Vietnam.

To Japan (1), we send our thanks to the College of Information Science and Engineering, Ritsumeikan University, Japan. To Sweden (2), we acknowledged the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. To the Philippines (3), we send our deepest thanks to Silliman University, Philippines. To Thailand (4), our acknowledgment goes to the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University, Thailand. To Taiwan (5), our thanks go to the National Chung Cheng University, Chiayi County, Taiwan, and the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, Taipei, Taiwan. To Egypt (6), we acknowledge Cairo University, Egypt.

To Northern Vietnam, we send our thanks to (1) the Board of Trustees, Hanoi University, Hanoi, and (2) the Faculty of Japanese Studies, Hanoi University, Hanoi. To Central Vietnam, our sincere thanks go to (3) the University of Foreign Language Studies, The University of Danang, Viet Nam.

To Southern Vietnam, we send our thanks to (1) HCMC University of Social Sciences and Humanities, HCMC National University, (2) Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Lang University, (3) Faculty of Foreign Languages, HCMC Open University, (4) Faculty of International Languages and Cultures, Hoa Sen University, (5) Faculty of Foreign Languages, Dong Nai Technology University, (6) Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance, and (7) the University of Labor and Social Affairs.

We send our big congratulations to those authors from Japan, Sweden, the Philippines, Thailand, Taiwan, Egypt, 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!

Sincerely yours



Associate Professor Ph.D. Van Chi Ho, Ph.D.

Editor-in-chief

Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Lang University


## The Opinions and Perceptions of K1-3 Parents in Relation to BYOD Implementation in Japanese Kindergartens

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### ABSTRACT

Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) is a concept that is gaining a following worldwide as a cost-effective means for schools to provide 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills (Bell, 2010) with limited funding. The current paper shows the results of a survey into the opinions and perceptions of parents of Japanese K1-3 students' use of technology, specifically the application of BYOD at this level. This survey was conducted at a private kindergarten in Japan and was administered to 100 parents of K1-3 students. Results of this survey showed that even at this age, students have access to and use a variety of devices within the home environment under the guidance of parents. In addition, device time usage varied significantly by household, with some children allowed to use devices for over 90 minutes per day. However, when asked if they would accept BYOD at the K1-3 level, the answers were overwhelmingly negative. Thus, the results of this survey show that while BYOD was considered acceptable from the higher grades of elementary school, the idea of implementing a BYOD program at the K1-3 level is still a step too far for parents of kindergarten students in Japan.

**Keywords:** BYOD, 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, K1-3, Japan

### Introduction

Mobile devices have become synonymous in our modern-day society. It has been said for some time now that we have reached a mobile saturation of sorts, with those in developed countries such as Japan nearing 100% ownership status (Statista, 2020). In Japan, the third-biggest economy in the world, it is the new norm to see devices in every facet of daily life. In fact, many people wonder how they would survive without using their devices, even for just a day. However, when mobile device use in education is discussed, the arguments for and against the use of technology in education can at times be polarizing. The pedagogical landscape of Japan suggests a need to develop curricula focusing on 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills (Mills & Thanyawatpokin, 2020) for a generation of students commonly thought of as digital natives (Prensky, 2001). This



paper aims to look at the opinions and perceptions of parents in Japan concerning bringing your own device (BYOD). Uniquely, this study focuses on the K1-3 level of education, a relatively new field, to investigate if the parents of K1-3 students are willing and able to integrate BYOD into the children's lives. This paper will first outline recent literature in the area of BYOD for K1-3 students, focusing on parents' perceptions. The paper will then outline the results of a BYOD survey given to 100 parents at a K1-3 institution in Japan and show a clear divide between those who do and those who do not believe BYOD is necessary for their child's education. The results will also show that all parents, whether for or against BYOD, can see that at some level of it will become mandatory in the future.

## Literature review

### *What is BYOD?*

Bring your own device (BYOD) is a technological model in which students are asked to provide their own devices to support their formal learning (Alberta Education, 2012). Since BYOD programs began, those involved with education have been exploring ways in which BYOD can be integrated into students' lives both inside and outside the classroom to increase the effectiveness of learning (Song & Kong, 2017), provide 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills (Bell, 2010), and provide for the digital natives (Prensky, 2001) of today. White (2016) highlighted that the need for BYOD at schools has come about by the reduction in the budgets of educational institutions year after year. However, at the same time, the cost of providing adequate education using the latest technology is more expensive than it has ever been (Nippon.com, 2019). While the pedagogical landscape has become increasingly digital (Mills & Thanyawatpokin, 2020), educators have struggled to provide a curriculum that balances the best learning environment for students with the digital tools at their disposal. Educators face the additional pressure of living in a time when ICT technology skills are believed to be essential to prevent a gap between the education provided and needed of the student of today (Ackerman and Krupp, 2012). The reduction in budgets of educational institutions has meant that the emphasis on purchasing and maintaining high-cost technological items such as computers, computer software, and, more recently, tablets are being placed on the families without consideration for the household's socioeconomic status.

BYOD as a concept for education first began to gain traction in North America but is now commonplace throughout educational institutions worldwide. While some might believe that BYOD is the magic bullet modern-day education needs, literature to date has confirmed both positives and negatives of BYOD programs. As far back as 2010, Chiong and Shuler (2010) found resistance to the use of technology in education, stating that there is evidence that parents of young children were not willing to recognize the educational benefits of mobile devices. Although, they did allow children to use these devices in a home context. This may suggest that parents viewed the device as a home play activity rather than for use in a formal education setting. Sadykova et al. (2016) found more negative views when they conducted a case study

on a private multilingual kindergarten and preschools in Russia that used iPad tasks in a bid to enhance the language curriculum. In this case study, 12 students participated using Reading Eggs (<https://readingeggs.com.au/>), an online reading program to enhance children's reading ability, as a homework activity for 30 days under parental supervision. The study found that parents, in some cases, did not believe in the potential modern mobile applications could provide younger children with both their literacy skills and foreign language development. Literature also shows that parents were, in some cases, unwilling or unable to assist children when doing their iPad-based homework activities as they lacked both digital literacy skills and foreign language skills (O'Bannon & Thomas, 2014). Although highlighting negative perceptions, this study does show the need for BYOD at the K1-3 level. By using the devices within a formal educational institution, the students would have access to educational professionals with both digital literacy and foreign language skills to make the device usage more effective. Kay and Schellenberg (2017) found a deep seated view among educators that mobile devices in class can provide more of a distraction from learning than a positive influence with a similar negative point of view. Their study of 80 high school students reported that while there were advantages to BYOD for learning, both the teachers and students could see how having these devices in the classroom could be a distraction for learning.

### *BYOD in K1-3*

This paper has a specific focus on K1-3 students and BYOD. Literature in this age group remains limited due to the newness of BYOD and the focus on implementing it at higher levels of education. Herodotou (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of 19 studies that reported the learning effects of touch screen devices such as tablets, iPads, and smartphones on young children five years old or younger and published after 2009. The author concluded that most of the studies focused on literacy, science, and math concerning the cognitive effects on younger children. Encouragingly for the future implementation of BYOD, the results of the studies were mainly positive. However, the author outlines a lack of research into children's social and emotional development and mobile devices' impact on this development. While beyond the scope of this paper, these are issues that need to be taken into consideration when attempting to implement a BYOD program.

Children are stimulated by technology outside of the classroom (Boyce, 2014), whether TV, the internet, or mobile devices. Nevertheless, when the same students enter the classroom environment, they are required to turn off their devices and, in many circumstances, return to a more traditional form of education. This powering down of students has been linked to a disinterest in education at a primary and secondary level, and it could be argued that kindergarten students also suffer from the same level of disengagement with their traditional classroom environment (Kopecký, 2021). The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has set a guideline of one hour of bad screen time for children between the ages of two to five (KidsHealth, 2019). In addition, a recent study found that children who use screens for long periods have lower structural integrity between the connections found in white matter (Barret, 2019). Finding the balance between good and bad screen time is still something that needs

further investigation for those who want to implement BYOD programs. It is also likely to be a significant concern to parents when deciding on their opinions of such programs.

### *Before BYOD Implementation*

From the above, we can see that careful planning needs to be considered before BYOD programs can be implemented. Ackerman and Krupp (2012) highlight five such areas.

1. Stakeholders. In BYOD, there are several stakeholders who are all highly invested in its success. Without the support of all stakeholders, the likelihood of success diminishes rapidly. The authors suggest that parents and teachers are the first stakeholders in any BYOD program. Both need to feel invested in the program, to be well informed, to be able to see the benefits of BYOD, and to have the ability to give feedback and state their opinions of the program without fear of reprisal. Stakeholders need regular indications about the effectiveness of their BYOD program, as, without this support, it might diminish. Students are also stakeholders in any BYOD program and require the same information as parents and teachers, especially in upper elementary, junior high, and high school levels. As with parents and teachers, the successful implementation of BYOD depends on the students being willing participants.

2. Security. This is arguably the most crucial consideration, especially for BYOD in education. The program needs to be monitored for both the security of the students and the school. Schools need to consider how using devices outside of the school's control fits in with their own security program, and in addition, they need to ensure the security of students using their own devices at school. With cyberbullying becoming more prominent in Japan (Udris, 2015), schools need to develop a clear no-tolerance policy to protect students.

3. Financial stability. While it may seem that BYOD is a budget-friendly option for technology implementation as students provide the devices, this is not always the case. Before and during BYOD, schools will need to invest in infrastructure such as high-speed and stable Wi-Fi, technical support, and funds for professional development of teachers who may not have the digital literacy skills or could possibly be resistant to the use of technology in the formal learning environment.

4. Professional development. As alluded to in (3), schools will need to conduct faculty development sessions. Outside institutions or more knowledgeable peers can run these. No matter how implemented, professional development will ensure that teachers can pass the skills onto students, enabling them to become autonomous learners.

5. Policies. An acceptable use policy (ACP) needs to be made between stakeholders before BYOD can be implemented. While the goal is to allow autonomous learning to enhance the students' experience, this should be done within the ACP created by all stakeholders.

### *Research Questions*

BYOD is now understood as one of the ways of delivering effective state-of-the-art education to students, providing them with essential ICT skills, and helping them become autonomous learners. Due to more BYOD programs being offered at educational institutions worldwide, an

increase of BYOD literature-based studies of these programs is now available to help stakeholders understand what BYOD means. However, there is a gap in the literature to date, focusing predominantly on elementary school students and above. In addition, the current body of research is mainly concerned with the user (student) experience and success of the program, not with the perception of parents concerning the implementation and success of BYOD. The current study is unique in that the focus is on the K1-3 level, a relatively unexplored area. In addition to this, this study delves into parents' perceptions of K1-3 students rather than student experience. This is because, arguably, at the K1-3 level, the parent is the essential stakeholder in implementing a successful BYOD program.

The following research questions are addressed in the study:

1. What access do K1-3 students have to mobile devices that could be used for BYOD programs?
2. How often and when are K1-3 students using mobile devices in their daily lives?
3. What are the opinion and perceptions of the parents of K1-3 students in regard to the use of mobile devices and the implementation of BYOD programs?

## Methods

This research project used a survey-based approach to collect data. The questions for the survey were modified from a previous BYOD survey conducted by White (2016) with Japanese elementary school students. The modifications were necessary to consider the advancement technology between the time of the initial and current survey and the differences in educational context between the elementary and kindergarten level. The statements for the survey were first taken from the original English versions, and once modified for K1-3 students was translated into Japanese (see appendix 1). The survey was then cross-referenced with the original 2016 survey to ensure that language in the modified version was a close match to the original. This was done to compare the results of both the previous survey and the current study. The survey was piloted by three parents of kindergarten-aged children with minor adjustments made for clarity based on the feedback received from these parents. The survey was distributed to 100 parents at a private Japanese kindergarten in western Japan with the permission of the kindergarten administration. The survey was given in the paper form, and parents were asked to complete it voluntarily over two weeks. The researcher decided to conduct a paper-based survey as responses were likely to be higher. Survey boxes were placed outside each classroom in the kindergarten to collect the completed surveys. This method was chosen to reduce the feeling of obligation some parents might feel if they were required to give completed responses directly to the teachers at the kindergarten. After the two-week collection period, 83 responses were received. This represented close to 90% of the parents at the kindergarten, as some families had two or three children enrolled and submitted a single survey for all of their children. After reviewing the responses, 74 of the 83 were considered to be statistically significant.

## Results/Findings and discussion

The first section of the survey asked the participants about the age of their children currently in kindergarten. As shown in Table 1, there were significantly more five-year-old students than the other age groups, with four-year-old being the second highest. Overall, there were slightly more male students than females, which is consistent with the demographics of the kindergarten in general. This question also shows the number of families with multiple children enrolled in the kindergarten and highlights that the 83-person response rate of this survey is exceptionally high given that only approximately 100 students were enrolled at the time the survey was taken.

**Table 1**

Participant information

	Three	Four	Five	Six	Total Number	Male	Female
Age of 1st child	12	16	30	16	74	36	38
Age of 2nd child	1	6	1	1	9	7	2
Age of 3rd child	0	1	0	0	1	0	1

The following section asked how many devices the kindergarten-aged students had access to in the house. Smartphones and iPhones made up the majority of the devices, with 168 devices in total. This confirms the current statistics concerning the saturation of mobile devices (Statista, 2020). As there are numerous models of iPhones, iPads, and smartphones that all provide similar functions, respondents were not asked to make a distinction between the models. It should be noted that this question refers to the number of devices a K1-3 child has access to, meaning the device does not need to belong to or be exclusively used by the child referred to in the survey. Given the age of the children and a large number of iPhones, iPads, and smartphones, it can be assumed that these devices do not belong to or were not for exclusive use by the child indicated in the survey. A presumption has been made that these devices belong to an adult or older sibling within the family and are shared by all family members.

**Table 2**

Number of devices kindergarten student has access to in the house

Total number of devices	Number
Nintendo DS	16
Nintendo 3DS	21
Portable PlayStation	8
iPhone	34
iPad	16
Smartphone (any model)	42
Tablet (any model)	17
Other	14
Total	168

The next section asked which device the child most often used. The results of this demonstrated that K1-3 students mainly used iPads, smartphones, and iPhones. This may suggest that parents of K1-3 students do not allow their children to use gaming-specific devices, or it could indicate that iPads, smartphones, and iPhones are more appealing to K1-3 students. In addition, the variety of the content available on iPads, smartphones, and iPhones, which includes both entertainment games and educational content, may be more appealing to parents compared to gaming consoles. This is because iPads, smartphones, and iPhones can be considered educational (Murkoff, 2019) and benefit their children's cognitive development, whereas gaming consoles are not.

**Table 3**

Device used most frequently by kindergarten-aged child

Which device does your child most often use?					
iPad	18	3DS	6	PSP	1
SF	17	DS	1	Gamepad	1
iPhone	14	Wii	3	WiiU	1

The next section aimed to discover how long K 1-3 children were using technology per usage. The answers provided some surprising results. Forty of the seventy-four respondents (54%) let their child use a device for between zero - 30 minutes, with 21 (28%) of those in this group allowing usage for between 21 - 30 minutes. This was the most common answer regarding device usage per time based on frequency. Unfortunately, the reason for this was not asked as part of the survey. However, informal conversations with some of the parents indicated that they based this on a feeling that this was the correct amount of time and not any specific guidelines. Although the parents had no understanding of any medical guidelines concerning this, they generally believed that to use the device for longer would be detrimental to the child's health, especially to their eyes. Current research on the subject indicates that the intuition of these parents is indeed correct. The prolonged use of digital devices has been linked to various physiological and psychological conditions (Lissak, 2018), and current research suggests screen time of under one hour per day (Canadian Pediatric Society, 2017). At the other end of the spectrum, three (4%) of the respondents indicated that their child was allowed to use a device for over 90 minutes at a time, with a further four (5%) allowing device usage for between 61 - 90 minutes. This was surprising given the aforementioned informal conversations held with some parents about the health effects of overuse of devices and possibly demonstrated how in some instances, parents are using devices to entertain children as they are busy with other tasks. As no questions were asked about the amount of time spent watching television and doing physical activity, it is difficult to predict exactly what the parents in this upper range feel about these activities compared to technology usage.

**Table 4****Length of technology use per usage**

How long does your kindergarten-aged child use technology per usage?	
No answer	12
0 - 10 minutes	15
11 - 20 minutes	4
21 - 30 minutes	21
31 - 40 minutes	3
41 - 50 minutes	4
51 - 60 minutes	8
61 - 90 minutes	4
91+ minutes	3
Total	74

The following section gives some clarity to the previous section. Firstly, 11 parents indicated that they do not let their children use technology. No justification was received for this. However, given the saturation of devices, it could be assumed that this was related to the parents' understanding of screen time health issues. Of the parents who allowed their child to use technology, the most frequent range was between one to five times a week, with three times the most frequent. At the other end of the spectrum, seven students were allowed to devices every day, and another six multiple times a day. The Japanese Pediatric association (2013) recommends less than two hours of digital activity per day. Thus, implementing a BYOD program at this age may cause some students to exceed their daily prescribed limits.

**Table 5****Technology use per week**

How many times do your kindergarten-aged children use technology per week?	
Zero	11
One	12
Two	7
Three	13
Four	3
Five	11
Six	4
Seven	7
Seven +	6
Total	74

The following section was designed to gain an understanding of when K1-3 students use technology. The results here are generally what might be expected of K1-3 students who do not use technology in their formal education. There was little use of devices in the morning on weekdays, with most usage occurring in afternoons or evenings after kindergarten had finished. This is an expected result as most children have little time to use devices before kindergarten on weekdays. Weekend usage indicated that most K1-3 children used devices in the mornings and afternoons, with relatively little use in the evenings. This may indicate those weekend evenings are a specific time when children are involved with other activities or have designated family time.

**Table 6**

Technology use time of day

When does your kindergarten-aged child use technology?	Weekday	Weekend
Morning	7	29
Afternoon	28	38
Evening	30	15
Doesn't use	12	4

The next series of statements were specifically related to BYOD and were based on a seven-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Although, as can be seen in the first statement, *I consciously monitor my child's technology use*, the general conclusion is that parents of K1-3 children do, in fact, monitor their use ( $m = 5.38$ ). Given the child's age, the researcher assumed that the median would be nearer seven (strongly agree). This result follows current literature (Gallego, 2020), suggesting that a minority of parents are comfortable with their children using devices, even if the device has internet capabilities and the child is using it without parental supervision. The result demonstrates the need for greater parental education into effective ways to keep children safe when using devices. This result may also suggest that the majority of parents may not be comfortable with BYOD as they cannot monitor device usage themselves, but instead need to trust the teacher to monitor technology usage to the same level as would be done in the home environment. As was outlined in the literature review, this suggests a need to better inform the stakeholders (Ackerman & Krupp, 2012) about the safety aspects of the BYOD program.

The statement, *it is a good idea for parents to talk to their kids about acceptable online behavior*, had a median of 6 ( $m = 6.06$ ). This result demonstrates that most parents are already discussing appropriate online behavior at the K1-3 age, which is also seen in the literature (Livingstone, 2015). When considering the implementation of BYOD at the K1-3 level, this result is encouraging, as the students would likely bring their device into the classroom with an understanding of the appropriate device use behavior expected, informed by one of the stakeholders. However, the standard of appropriate behavior would differ from household to household. Thus, the school would need to ensure their online behavior policy was enforced



within the school environment.

The next statement, *monitoring my child's technology use is a violation of their privacy*, demonstrated that most parents disagreed with this statement,  $m = 2.60$ . For the implementation of BYOD at K1-3, this is a significant result. Within the school environment, technology use would need to be monitored to ensure the student's safety. Without the understanding of the parents, the enforcement of this BYOD policy could not be successfully implemented. However, some respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. This result was unexpected; however, it highlights that a proportion of parents place importance on their child's privacy, even at an age where they are dependent on their parents for almost every facet of their daily lives. As has been referred to, implementing a successful BYOD program at the K1-3 level can only occur when all stakeholders are fully informed and positive and negative opinions are shared. A failure to do this could risk the program's success by having a core set of dissatisfied stakeholders.

The final statement, *monitoring a child's technology use can help keep them safe*, received an  $m = 5.79$ . As with the previous statement, some respondents disagreed, which again focuses on fully informing parents about how monitoring technology usage can help keep a child safe from online dangers.

**Table 7**

Parental monitoring of technology use

	Median	Mode	SD	Variance
I consciously monitor my child's technology use.	5.38	6.00	1.01	1.01
It is a good idea for parents to talk to their kids about acceptable online behavior	6.06	6.00	0.79	0.62
Monitoring my child's technology use is a violation of their privacy	2.60	2.00	1.26	1.58
Monitoring a child's technology use can help keep them safe	5.79	6.00	1.01	1.02

The next set of statements was designed to discover when parents believed children should bring their device into formal education. As shown in Table 8, there is a clear pattern in which parents do not begin to answer positively until the third grade of elementary school ( $m = 3.26$ ), approximately eight years of age. The answers are particularly negative in the K1 ( $m=1.93$ ), K2 (2.00), and K3 (2.24), suggesting that parents of K1-3 students do not want BYOD at the kindergarten level even though the majority of parents allow some form of technology usage in the home. Whether this is related to the health issues, safety, or other issues outlined previously is unknown. However, there are some positives for implementing BYOD within formal schooling, with acceptance most likely from the third grade.

**Table 8**

## BYOD implementation age

My child should bring their own device to school from...	Median	Mode	SD	Variance
Kindergarten 1 <sup>st</sup> grade	1.93	2.00	0.86	0.73
Kindergarten 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	2.00	2.00	0.93	0.86
Kindergarten 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	2.24	2.00	1.23	1.49
Elementary school 1 <sup>st</sup> grade	2.78	2.00	1.39	1.90
Elementary school 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	2.88	2.00	1.41	1.98
Elementary school 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	3.26	4.00	1.57	2.49
Elementary school 4 <sup>th</sup> grade	3.67	4.00	1.53	2.38
Elementary school 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	4.01	4.00	1.57	2.48
Elementary school 6 <sup>th</sup> grade	4.06	4.00	1.56	2.47

Further evidence to the above is provided by the answers to the following statements in Table 9. For the statement, *BYOD will become more important as my child gets older*. The median was 4.94, suggesting that parents believe that BYOD will become a part of education for children at some point in their education, but not until they become older and able to understand the responsibilities that come with BYOD. This may suggest that concerns relating to safety and security for parents outweigh health concerns. The answers to the statement, *parents should be consulted before implementing a BYOD program* were more optimistic ( $m = 5.92$ ). This illustrates that as stakeholders', parents of K1-3 students feel that their inclusion in the decision-making process is justified. For schools, this is an important finding, as in previous examples of BYOD implementation, parents are often the last of the stakeholders to be informed. Disregarding parents in the BYOD decision-making process could lead to animosity between parents and the school, which could cause BYOD to be unsuccessful. The final statement, *Japanese schools, are ready to implement BYOD programs*, had a mean of 2.93. This result highlights the negative view of many of the parents of K1-3 students towards the Japanese education system and its ability to be ready to implement BYOD programs in the future. This again highlights the need for educational institutions in Japan to get all stakeholders involved in discussions about BYOD. Failure to do so will likely lead to a BYOD program that is a cause of animosity between stakeholders.

**Table 9**

## BYOD appropriateness in education

	Median	mode	SD	Variance
BYOD will become more important as my child gets older	4.94	5.00	1.30	1.72
Parents should be consulted before the implementation of a BYOD program	5.92	6.00	1.21	1.45
Japanese schools (kindergartens/elementary) are ready to implement BYOD programs	2.93	4.00	1.18	1.39

## Discussion

Looking at the survey results, there are some clear indications regarding the thinking of K1-3 parents, which will now be discussed in relation to the research questions.

### *1. What access do K1-3 students have to mobile devices that could be used for BYOD programs?*

K1-3 students, in this survey, have access to a range of technological devices. The devices include gaming consoles, tablets, smartphones, and many of the devices had internet capabilities. This is in line with what is seen in Japanese society (Statista, 2020) and demonstrates that Japan is well placed to implement BYOD to provide the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills (Mills & Thanyawatpokin, 2020) required of the digital natives of today (Prensky, 2001). However, this result only takes into consideration the number of devices and not how often the students are permitted access to them. This will be addressed in the second research question.

### *2. How often and when are K1-3 students using mobile devices in their daily lives?*

From research question one, we can see that K1-3 students have access to multiple devices. However, the results of how often and when students can use these devices show us that there are some restrictions at this level that could influence BYOD implementation. Results showed that only a small proportion of the students were allowed to use a device daily. In addition to this, a significant number of students were not granted access to technology at all. While some of the students were able to use devices for 60 minutes or more per time, the most frequent amount of time for the device was between 20-30 minutes each time. Results indicated that weekday evenings and weekend mornings were the most common time for using devices. Given the restrictions some parents put on device use, this may suggest that students would have less access to their leisure time if a BYOD program was implemented at the K1-3 level. The reason for this will be discussed further in research question three.

### *3. What are the opinion and perceptions of the parents of K1-3 students in regard to the use of mobile devices and the implementation of BYOD programs?*

Results from research question two showed that a significant number of parents restricted device use. These restrictions can be related to the time of use, time limits, and frequency. The literature suggests parents of K1-3 students are conscious of the health effects prolonged use of digital devices may have, such as physiological and psychological conditions (Lissak, 2018). In addition, parents may also be aware of the limits on screen time suggested for children of this age (Japanese Pediatric association, 2013; Canadian Pediatric Society, 2017). Results suggest that parents of K1-3 students are aware of the concept of BYOD and realize that it may be implemented in the future, particularly towards the upper grades of elementary school. Parents do seem to believe that BYOD is essential to their child's future and that mobile devices can be educational (Murkoff, 2019). However, the implementation of BYOD at the K1-3 level, based on this sample population, can not occur at present. It is clear that the stakeholders need to discuss security and safety if any BYOD program is to be used at this level and that parents, as key stakeholders, need a significant say in the direction of these programs. To disregard parents'

opinions will likely cause animosity towards the program, and support will likely not be given. This is a result found in White's (2016) study of BYOD at the elementary school level of Japan. Thus, parents at all educational levels in Japan feel the need to be involved in major BYOD decisions.

While the current study showed some favorable results for the future implementation of BYOD, some limitations should be addressed. The population for the survey consisted of one kindergarten with a limited population. To gain a deeper understanding of the topic, further surveys would need to be administered at a range of different kindergartens. In addition, the questions in the survey were all closed. To gain some valuable qualitative data, some open-ended questions should have been used.

## Conclusion

BYOD is becoming increasingly common and understood in the educational world. More parents and educators realize the positives it can have on 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills and the negative of BYOD can bring to the formal classroom environment. This paper has delved into the parents' opinions of K1-3 students with BYOD implementation at the K1-3 level to see how parents allow technology to be used in their household, and whether those policies would transfer to the formal learning environment. Results from this study have shown that K1-3 students already have access to a variety of technology in their homes, but the amount and time of use vary significantly for each household. These variances are thought to be related to parents' understanding of health issues around device usage and not concerning a lack of available devices. Parents seem unwilling when asked about bringing devices into the formal learning environment. The data from the current study suggests that this may be related to health and security issues rather than being against the use of technology. The results showed that while K1-3 might be too early for implementing BYOD, parents agreed that BYOD would form a crucial role in their child's education in the future. Parents indicated that the most appropriate time to begin BYOD was from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of elementary school. One of the most critical findings from this research is the need for all stakeholders to become involved in the BYOD implementation decision-making process to ensure BYOD success.

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## Biodata

*Jeremy White is an associate professor in the College of Information Science and Engineering of Ritsumeikan University. He has master degrees in applied linguistics and education from Griffith University and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the graduate school of Human and Environmental Studies at Kyoto University. Jeremy has published on a variety of subjects including game-jams, game-based learning, digital stories, computer assisted language learning, and mobile learning.*

## Appendix 1



### Survey Regarding BYOD in Japanese Kindergartens

Hello, my name is Jeremy White. I am the father of [REDACTED] in Umi-gumi. I am also an Associate Professor at Ritsumeikan University. My research interest is the use of technology in the classroom. Raising a child, I have become interested in how kindergarten use technology. I have noticed the opinions of parents vary a lot, and I would like to get a better understanding of this issue. I would be grateful if you could out this survey. There is no correct or incorrect answer.

Please note:

All data collected will be kept private and only be used for research purposes. No identifiable data will be collected, and you will not be contacted for further research if you choose to take part.

If you have any questions about this survey, or would like to be informed of the results please contact me at: [jwhite@fc.ritsumei.ac.jp](mailto:jwhite@fc.ritsumei.ac.jp)

If you would like to know more about my research, please use the following QR code. Most of my research is in English.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Regards,  
Jeremy White  
Associate Professor  
College of Information Science and Engineering  
Ritsumeikan University

## BYOD Survey

**Please complete the survey below and return in the envelope  
provided by \_\_\_\_\_**

① 幼稚園児のお子様の年齢と性別に○を書いて下さい。

	年齢 (歳)				性別	
	3	4	5	6	男子	女子
1人目	3	4	5	6	男子	女子
2人目	3	4	5	6	男子	女子
3人目	3	4	5	6	男子	女子
4人目	3	4	5	6	男子	女子

② お子様は下記のどの機器を使用していますか？当てはまるものすべてに☑してください。また、家庭内全部でいくつお持ちですか？該当する個数に○をして下さい。

	機器	個数 (個)					
		1	2	3	4	5	5以上
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Nintendo DS	1	2	3	4	5	5以上
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Nintendo 3DS	1	2	3	4	5	5以上
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Portable play station (PSP)	1	2	3	4	5	5以上
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> iPhone (どのモデルでも)	1	2	3	4	5	5以上
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> iPad (どのモデルでも)	1	2	3	4	5	5以上



②お子様は下記のどの機器を使用していますか？当てはまるものすべてに☑してください。また、家庭内全部でいくつお持ちですか？該当する個数に○をして下さい。

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> スマートフォン (どのモデルでも)	1	2	3	4	5	5 以上
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> タブレット (iPad以外のどのモデルでも)	1	2	3	4	5	5 以上
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> その他 (機器名 )	1	2	3	4	5	5 以上
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> その他 (機器名 )	1	2	3	4	5	5 以上

③お子様はどの機器を一番頻繁に使用しますか？当てはまる機器を○で囲ってください。

1 人目	Nintendo DS	Nintendo 3DS	Portable play station (PSP)	iPhone (どのモデルでも)	iPad (どのモデルでも)	スマートフォン (どのモデルでも)	タブレット (iPad以外のどのモデルでも)	その他 機器名
2 人目	Nintendo DS	Nintendo 3DS	Portable play station (PSP)	iPhone (どのモデルでも)	iPad (どのモデルでも)	スマートフォン (どのモデルでも)	タブレット (iPad以外のどのモデルでも)	その他 機器名
3 人目	Nintendo DS	Nintendo 3DS	Portable play station (PSP)	iPhone (どのモデルでも)	iPad (どのモデルでも)	スマートフォン (どのモデルでも)	タブレット (iPad以外のどのモデルでも)	その他 機器名
4 人目	Nintendo DS	Nintendo 3DS	Portable play station (PSP)	iPhone (どのモデルでも)	iPad (どのモデルでも)	スマートフォン (どのモデルでも)	タブレット (iPad以外のどのモデルでも)	その他 機器名

④お子様はどれくらいの頻度でその機器を使用しますか？当てはまる箇所に☑してください。  
(一番使用頻度の高い機器の場合)

<input type="checkbox"/>	0 - 10 分	<input type="checkbox"/>	21 - 30 分	<input type="checkbox"/>	41 - 50 分	<input type="checkbox"/>	61 - 90
<input type="checkbox"/>	11 - 20 分	<input type="checkbox"/>	31 - 40 分	<input type="checkbox"/>	51 - 60 分	<input type="checkbox"/>	191 分以上

⑤お子様は一週間の内どれくらいの頻度でその機器を使用しますか？

<input type="checkbox"/>	一週間に1回	<input type="checkbox"/>	一週間に3回	<input type="checkbox"/>	一週間に5回	<input type="checkbox"/>	一週間に7回
<input type="checkbox"/>	一週間に2回	<input type="checkbox"/>	一週間に4回	<input type="checkbox"/>	一週間に6回	<input type="checkbox"/>	一週間に7回以上

⑥お子様は平日、一日の中でいつその機器を使用しますか？当てはまるものすべてに

してください。

<input type="checkbox"/>	午前中	<input type="checkbox"/>	午後	<input type="checkbox"/>	夜（就寝前）
--------------------------	-----	--------------------------	----	--------------------------	--------

下記の項目について、あなたのご意見をお聞かせください。当てはまる回答を○で囲ってくだ

⑦お子様は週末、いつその機器を使用しますか？当てはまるものすべてにしてください。

<input type="checkbox"/>	午前中	<input type="checkbox"/>	午後	<input type="checkbox"/>	夜（就寝前）
--------------------------	-----	--------------------------	----	--------------------------	--------

私は意識的に子どものテクノロジーの使用を監視している。	強く反対	反対	やや反対	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成
保護者が子ども達にインターネット上での適切な行動について話すことは良い考えだと思う。	強く反対	反対	やや反対	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成
子どものテクノロジーの使用を監視することはプライバシーの侵害になる。	強く反対	反対	やや反対	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成
子どものテクノロジーの使用を監視することは子どもの安全を守ることになる。	強く反対	反対	やや反対	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成

使いやすさについて							
スマートフォン、タブレット、またはその他のICTを使用することは...							
( ICTとは、Information and Communication Technologyの略で情報通信技術の略を意味します。)							
1.子どもの学業成績を向上させる。	全くそう思わない	思わない	あまり思わない	どちらでもない	少し思う	思う	強くそう思う
2.子どもの学習能力を向上させる。	全くそう思わない	思わない	あまり思わない	どちらでもない	少し思う	思う	強くそう思う
3.子どもの学習効率を高める。	全くそう思わない	思わない	あまり思わない	どちらでもない	少し思う	思う	強くそう思う
4.私の子どもはスマートフォン、タブレット及びその他ICTテクノロジーの使い方を自分で操作できる。	全くそう思わない	思わない	あまり思わない	どちらでもない	少し思う	思う	強くそう思う
5.私の子どもは、授業の中でスマートフォン、タブレット及びその他ICTテクノロジーを活用する場合、簡単に操作できると思う。	全くそう思わない	思わない	あまり思わない	どちらでもない	少し思う	思う	強くそう思う

学びの機会について							
スマートフォン、タブレット、またはその他のICTを使用することは...							
1.子どもにテクノロジーを試みる機会を与える。	全くそう思わない	思わない	あまり思わない	どちらでもない	少し思う	思う	強くそう思う
2.子どもの学習過程を管理できる。	全くそう思わない	思わない	あまり思わない	どちらでもない	少し思う	思う	強くそう思う
3.学習した事を経験する機会を与える。	全くそう思わない	思わない	あまり思わない	どちらでもない	少し思う	思う	強くそう思う
4.様々な分野を行き来できる。	全くそう思わない	思わない	あまり思わない	どちらでもない	少し思う	思う	強くそう思う
5.他の子ども達と交流できる。	全くそう思わない	思わない	あまり思わない	どちらでもない	少し思う	思う	強くそう思う
6.批判的に考える事ができる。	全くそう思わない	思わない	あまり思わない	どちらでもない	少し思う	思う	強くそう思う

7. 子ども達にやる気を起こさせる。	全くそう思わない	思わない	あまり思わない	どちらでもない	少し思う	思う	強くそう思う
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BYODプログラムについて (BYODとは、Bring Your Own Deviceの略であり、授業で使用するために幼稚園や学校にそれぞれ自分達が持っている機器を持参することを意味します。)							
1. 私の子どもは、幼稚園年少から自分の機器を幼稚園に持参するべきである。	強く反対	反対	やや反対	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成
2. 私の子どもは、幼稚園年中から自分の機器を幼稚園に持参するべきである。	強く反対	反対	やや反対	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成
3. 私の子どもは、幼稚園年長から自分の機器を幼稚園に持参するべきである。	強く反対	反対	やや反対	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成
4. 私の子どもは、小学校一年生から学校に自分の機器を持参するべきである。	強く反対	反対	やや反対	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成
5. 私の子どもは、小学校二年生から学校に自分の機器を持参するべきである。	強く反対	反対	やや反対	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成
6. 私の子どもは、小学校三年生から学校に自分の機器を持参するべきである。	強く反対	反対	やや反対	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成
7. 私の子どもは、小学校四年生から学校に自分の機器を持参するべきである。	強く反対	反対	やや反対	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成
8. 私の子どもは、小学校五年生から学校に自分の機器を持参するべきである。	強く反対	反対	やや反対	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成
9. 私の子どもは、小学校六年生から学校に自分の機器を持参するべきである。	強く反対	反対	やや反対	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成
10. BYODプログラムは、私の子どもが大きくなるにつれて、より重要になると思う。	全くそう思わない	思わない	あまり思わない	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成

BYODプログラムについて (BYODとは、Bring Your Own Deviceの略であり、授業で使用するために幼稚園や学校にそれぞれ自分達が持っている機器を持参することを意味します。)							
11. 保護者は、BYODプログラムが導入される前に、相談の機会を与えられるべきである。	全くそう 思わない	思わ ない	あまり思 わない	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成
12. 日本の公立小学校は、BYODプログラムを導入する準備が整っていると思う。	全くそう 思わない	思わ ない	あまり思 わない	どちらでもない	やや賛成	賛成	強く賛成

## The Influence of Single-Clause Sentences on IELTS Writing Task 2 Band Score


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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** IELTS, writing task 2, types of sentences, single-clause sentences, multi-clause sentences.

This research aims to investigate the frequencies of single-clause sentences (SS) and multi-clause sentences (MS) used by IELTS test-takers in writing task 2 and the relationship between their use of single-clause sentences and band score in this section. The researcher used the descriptive comparative research design and the quantitative method design with convenient sampling with fifty (50) sample essays mainly sourced from the set of Cambridge English IELTS Academic books. After collecting the data, the researchers analyzed the data using statistical and descriptive analysis. The result shows that the percentages of single-clause and multi-clause sentences in the range between 0 and 6.0 bands are relatively equal. On the other hand, these percentages in the range of 6.5-9.0 have a significant difference. Additionally, the results of Pearson Correlation Analysis show that the frequency of single-clause sentences has an insignificant negative relationship with the IELTS writing task 2 band score. Therefore, IELTS writing task 2 compositions with more single-clause sentences are potentially graded with a lower band score.

### Introduction

The evolution and distribution of any high-quality test necessitate suitable systems for producing the test as well as administering and evaluating it continuously. In response to this belief, the revision of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) includes four determinants: theoretical foundation, administrative issues, practical perspectives, and technological breakthroughs. Experiencing a number of years, IELTS has witnessed an uninterrupted increase in the number of candidates worldwide. According to IELTS (2019), it was recorded that around 3.5 million individuals were taking this test. This test result potentially aligns with demonstrating numerous of candidates' language-related spheres, including English

knowledge, necessary skills for achieving higher education, professional situations, real-life contexts. Specifically, James Shipton, Head IELTS, British Council, states that this test offers a gateway for its candidates to accomplish their aspirations such as pursuing their target tertiary institutions, kickstart their profession, or migrating to their dream country (IELTS, 2019). Unquestionably, not only students but adults also consider IELTS as a compelling opportunity related to their target. Therefore, candidates tend to attempt to achieve a high band score in each skill.

The writing section is generally regarded as the most difficult ones in the IELTS test because of its complicated requirements. Writing has been proven to be a complicated skill (Tran and Nguyen, 2021). To be more specific, students' writing in English as a foreign language may have difficulties in grammar, structures of arguments due to the fact that different language seems to have different ways of organizing ideas and arguments (Hyland, 2013, as cited in Ndoricimpa & Barad (2021). According to Tran and Nguyen (2021), writing requires students to think critically about the process of writing, including task responses, coherence and cohesion, lexical resources, and grammar range and accuracy acquired via language exposure.

As a result, producing an essay including an indicated style is never an easy feat for any candidate. Indeed, they have to think about spelling mistakes, genres, grammar, and etc. In this respect, grammar seems to be the most important dimension that test-takers need to understand because it possibly reflects the meaning of their writing. Veit (1986) mentions that grammar includes principles or rules forming an unlimited number of sentences out of a constrained number of words. Quirk (1985) assumes that a sentence is "the highest-ranking unit of grammar." Besides, the types of sentences that test-takers employ in their writing are also important to analyze their ability to construct sentences.

Apparently, sentence types align with grammatical requirements in both academic writings. Concerning IELTS, Tran (2016) reports that candidates often find it challenging to construct sentences and paragraphs, which are indispensable components in Task 2. As a result, sentence types may affect their band score in this task.

There are currently plenty of articles addressing learners' use of types of sentences in academic essays. However, research on the types of sentences used by candidates in IELTS writing task 2 is scant. Since this problem can be identified in a detailed manner, this study is of relevance to this standardized test. Henceforth, this paper is expected to investigate the frequencies of single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences used by IELTS test-takers in writing task 2 and indicate whether sentence types related to grammar requirements in IELTS writing task 2 affect the test takers' band score. Thanks to that, the test takers can receive useful suggestions on this aspect in their performance, and the IELTS trainers can adopt practical suggestions to ameliorate their learners' composition.

## Literature review

### *Overview of IELTS*

IELTS was first released in 1976 and introduced in 1980 by the British Council. In 1989, it was regarded as a course requirement in English-speaking countries. This test is reliable to evaluate test takers' English proficiency with a 0–9 band scale (IELTS, n.d.).

IELTS offers two test modules for candidates to choose from general training and academic. All test takers join the same Listening and Speaking Modules but have different Reading and Writing Modules choices. The Academic Reading and Writing Modules assess whether a test taker is appropriate for studying with the medium of English at the tertiary level. The General Training Reading and Writing Modules emphasize communication skills in social and educational contexts.

Despite being administered mainly by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), IELTS can be supervised by the approved centers to administrate the test and guarantee the provision of well-trained examiners. The examination is co-owned by the British Council, IDP, and Cambridge Assessment English (IELTS, n.d.) and is taken place in 120 countries across the world. Therefore, Uysal (2009) states that IELTS is one of the most prevailing tests.

### *IELTS Writing Task 2*

There are two distinct tasks in the IELTS academic writing test. The overall band score, which is more heavily weighted towards task 2, evaluates the test takers' ability to produce a discursive composition to respond to an open-ended prompt with eligible style, register, structure, and content. An IELTS academic writing test includes two tasks. Moore and Morton (2005) elaborate that the overall band score is more heavily weighted towards Writing Task 2, which assesses a candidate's ability to write a discursive composition in response to an open-ended prompt, using appropriate content, style, register, and organization. Specifically, Cullen (2017) explains that IELTS writing task 2 provides candidates a topic and a question to require them to express relevant perspectives on the matter formally. As aforementioned from Uysal's view (2009), learning writing is complex and difficult. Accordingly, this task is believed to be a challenging one for candidates. It necessitates their background knowledge about social issues to accomplish flying colors (Wilson, 2010). Moreover, the time constraint, unpredictable topics, or idiosyncratic affective factors impede their performance.

### *Four writing criteria*

With regards to assessment, candidates' writing production is marked in compliance with the band descriptors by well-trained examiners. There are four criteria for assessing: task achievement, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical range and accuracy (UCLES, 2004). In this case, each criterion is described on a 0-9 scale that can denote specific abilities of the test takers. As can be seen from the writing band score description, a candidate's essay is graded based on four criteria: task response, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource,



and grammatical range and accuracy.

To be explained, task achievement pertains to how the candidates construct and state their position to respond to the given topic by releasing relevant perspectives and examples; however, they are required to ensure the essay length (Bagheri & Riasati, 2016). According to IELTS Consulting (n,d), 25% of the score is because of task response in the writing test. This refers to completing the given task, including all the minute details specified in the question prompt. In order to score well for task response, the candidate should first understand the given question properly to decide the main idea behind the question and the main theme of the essay. Second, candidates have to use relevant examples. Every question should be supported with relevant examples and supporting evidence in order to score well for task response. Finally, another important aspect of the response is letting the reader know about candidates' opinions in the essay. Some of the essay types require an opinion directly, but they are not required to give their own opinions for the other essays.

Next, coherence and cohesion criteria generally refer to how examinees establish their essays (UCLES, 2004). Specifically, coherence assesses how the ideas are linked inextricably while cohesion aligns with test takers' ability to use cohesive devices (e.g., in conclusion, however, moreover). According to E2 Test Prep (n,d), coherence simply means "structure" – paragraph and essay structure, so to get a high score in Coherence and Cohesion, candidates' essays should follow a certain structure. On the other hand, cohesion means "flow", which means how well the ideas follow from one to the next with the seamless and logical transition. Another way to connect ideas is to use linking words. However, it is not advised to include more than two of these kinds of words in a paragraph. Overusing linking words will bring the coherence and cohesion band score down. Cullen (2017) summarizes that these criteria, including task achievement, coherence, and cohesion, necessitate the candidates to write a formal 250-word essay with supporting arguments, logical organization of paragraphs, rational explanations, and clear examples.

According to Magoosh Blog (n,d), the third criterion is Lexical resource, which means candidates' ability to use a wide range of vocabulary without errors and appropriately in the proper context. This criterion aims to check whether candidates have good enough vocabulary to paraphrase the information in their written text properly. The examiners usually look at the candidate's range and accuracy of vocabulary and see how well words are used to express the thought and ideas as well.

Apart from these criteria, sentence types belong to the fourth one, grammatical range and accuracy, which requires test takers to diversify their sentence structures without grammar and punctuation mistakes. This criterion takes 25% of the overall writing mark. This means that not only does the grammar used correctly, it also has to be varied.

Although types of sentences are a small part of the criteria for assessing an IELTS writing essay, it matters that most IELTS takers have a concern about what types of sentences are advised for them to use and with what frequency is considered to be good. Thus, this paper

concerning the types of sentences used in IELTS task 2 is expected to examine the impact of this criterion on candidates' band scores.

### *Definition of Sentence*

A sentence pertains to a sequence of words communicating the writer's one or more ideas. Winter (1999) states that clauses in each sentence can express these ideas. Fleming (2006) supplements that a sentence consists of at least one clause with at least one subject and one finite verb. In this respect, independent clauses and dependent clauses are two remarkable ones in sentences. Independent clause, which includes the main subject and verb, can stand alone as a complete grammatical item, like a single-clause sentence. On the other hand, an extra element changes the independent clause into a dependent one; therefore, the dependent clause has to be linked with the independent one, like a multi-clause sentence. In short, a sentence turns out to be a basic unit of thought in English grammar that contains at least a subject and verb.

### *Sentence Components*

In each sentence, subject and predicate appear as two main components which are necessary for the present researchers to take into account. First, the subject, which refers to the person, place, or thing performing the action of the sentence, is the representative of what or whom in the sentence. A subject can be a noun or pronoun along with modifying words, even phrases or clauses. Second, a predicate relates to a word or a group of words that normally follows the subject. The predicate, which shows the action or being within the sentence, contains the verb and modifying words, phrases, or even clauses.

### *Types of English Sentences*

There are four types of sentences, including simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences (Oshima & Hogue, 2007).

A simple sentence includes subjects, verbs, and other optional elements such as objects, adverbs, etc. A simple sentence has some remarkable patterns, such as subject-verb-verb and subject-subject-verb-verb. For instance, the sentence "Customers often search for the best deals and make purchases on Web-based shops" relates to the first pattern. The sentence "Tom and Marry usually search for the best deals and make purchases on Web-based shops" relates to the second pattern. Apparently, a simple sentence can include a compound subject and predicate as long as these belong to an independent clause.

A compound sentence is constituted by two or more independent clauses that are joined by other elements, namely, coordinators, conjunctive adverbs, and semicolons (;). Therefore, this type of sentence contains at least two full predications as independent clauses. There are some noticeable coordinators such as for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so and several common conjunctive adverbs such as furthermore (addition), accordingly (result), however (concession). For example, the sentence "Most of the customers prefer to making purchases online; the rest is in favor of traditional purchasing model" includes the semicolon. The sentence "Youngsters are into making purchases online, so they are often considered as big spenders" includes a

coordinator.

A complex sentence is composed of one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. These clauses are in relation thanks to subordinators (e.g., after, although, because, unless, when) and relative pronouns (e.g., who, which, that). In this case, dependent clauses play roles as a noun, adjectives, or adverbs. This sentence, "Soon after her favorite online store opened, Marry made a purchase on a pair of trendy shoes," exemplifies a complex sentence with subordinators. Obviously, while the main clause or independent possesses a complete meaning, the subordinate or dependent clause has an incomplete one. However, both need to be connected together in order to convey the sentence's meaning.

A compound-complex sentence includes at least three clauses, at least two of which are independent ones. Needless to say, this sentence type is combined by both compound and complex sentences by the connection of coordinators, subordinators, and comma. For example, "Numerous citizens make purchases online on a daily basis, but countryside habitats prefer going to traditional grocery stores because they are able to directly observe what they buy". There is a coordinator "but" shows contrast, and it is also followed by coordinator "because" shows the reason in this sentence; besides, a comma is used before "but" to segment the long sentence.

### *Types of Sentences in This Study*

As aforementioned, this study aims to discover the relationship between the single-clause sentences and the IELTS writing task 2 band score. Therefore, there are two main types of sentences: single-clause sentence (SS) and multi-clause sentence (MS). Specifically, single-clause sentences refer to a sentence including only one independent clause, and multi-clause sentences pertain to a sentence with the combination of at least one independent clause and one dependent clause.

### *Review of Related Findings*

A number of existing studies have investigated the types of sentences in students' composition; consequently, they have also yielded valuable insights into this paper's purposes. In a comparative study, Demirezen (2013) discovers the ability of 35 English-majored freshmen at low intermediate levels to discriminate the four main types of sentences. The participants take a pre-test of 20 multiple-choice questions as an initial measurement, then they receive an intense two-week-six hours of treatment teaching, and finally implement a post-test. In the result section, the study presents that the mean score of the pre-test is 23% and that of the post-test comes up to be 56 %. Accordingly, he concludes that redial teaching treatment promotes the students' performance to identify simple, compound, complex sentences, and compound-complex sentences. Above all, the researcher indicates that lower-intermediate students usually struggle with recognizing types of sentences, which is at the expense of their inappropriate or misunderstandable ideas.

Likewise, Handayani (2019) also shares this school of thought in his descriptive qualitative

study exploring the sentence structure in academic articles of 60 students. There are four noticeable results shown. First, half of the participants are not able to produce clear sentences. Next, two-thirds of them do not make a clear connection between the main clause and the subordinate one. Third, most of them seem to struggle with varying their use of sentences. Finally, the same number of participants are hindered from structuring their academic paragraphs. Therefore, the researcher states that the most remarkable difficulty of the students in academic writing pertains to their reiterated use of sentence types.

Regarding the compound-complex sentence, Rahma et al. (2021) conduct descriptive research to examine whether the students are able to formulate this type. The researchers use the cluster sampling technique to recruit 30 English-majored sophomores as their participants and their essays to identify the number of compound-complex sentences. Besides, they also grade the quality of the students' production with a 4-level scale from poor to excellent. The results show that most students are relatively adept at constructing compound-complex sentences. However, there are several remarkable difficulties they encounter. First, they tend to not merely remove the comma before coordinators (e.g., and, but) but also the subject after these connectors to structure the second sentence. The researchers conclude that the students are occasionally unaware of the structural properties of compound-complex sentences, which harm their correct production of this sentence type. Therefore, they suggest that students had better receive deeper discussion on types of sentences to apply these in their essay as well as more tasks for them to practice on their own.

Additionally, in a quantitative study conducted by Sukandi and Merina (2017), the researchers examine the frequencies of four sentence types in 71 paragraphs belonging to five writing genres: process, argumentative, descriptive, cause-effect, and comparison-contrast. The finding presents that simple sentences turn out to attract the students' interest in utilizing most. Besides, they figure out that the EFL students encounter constructing their sentences and making prominent mistakes due to their deficiency of practicing. Similarly, Saragih et al. (2020) investigate the frequencies of four sentence types used by female and male writers in their abstracts of the journal articles. The researchers collected 20 abstracts from 20 writers of both genders and compared the number of four sentence types. The results show that both genders prioritize employing simple sentences in their writing production; however, they seem not to express their interest in compound-complex sentences. Besides, the researchers discern that there is no noticeable relationship between gender and frequencies of sentence types. Nonetheless, women seem to simplify their writing which is characterized by debilitation with expressions of gratitude, whereas men tend to seek position, powerfulness, supremacy, and their style is linked with strong and constant assertions.

Although there has been a substantial source of studies investigating the types of sentences in students' composition in academic context, it lacks works regarding types of sentences in IELTS test takers' compositions in writing task 2. Accordingly, this paper is carried out to contribute to this gap.

### Research Questions

The purposes of this study are to investigate the frequencies of single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences used by IELTS test-takers in writing task 2 and the relationship between their use of single-clause sentences and band score in this section. In order to accomplish these aims, this paper is expected to answer two research questions:

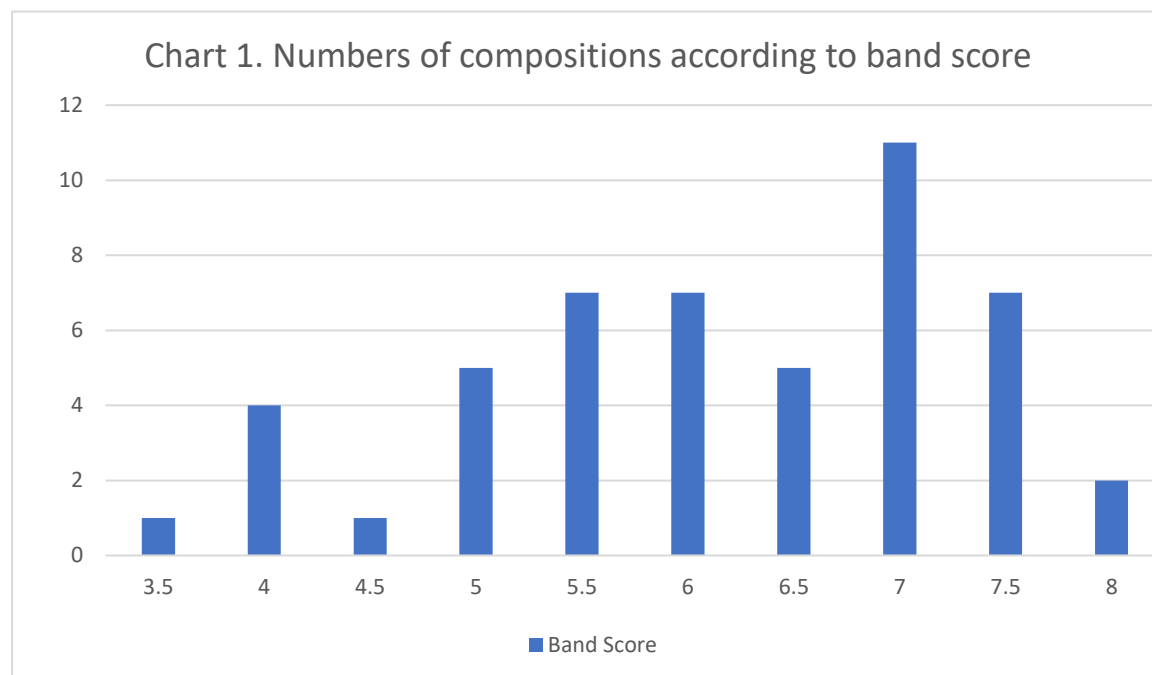
1/ What are the frequencies of single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences in IELTS writing task 2 written by the candidates?

2/ Is there a relationship between the use of single-clause sentences and IELTS writing task 2 band score?

### Methods

#### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

The object of this research is 50 IELTS writing task 2 compositions written by candidates. They are graded and added in Cambridge English IELTS Academic books as writing samples. The Cambridge English IELTS Academic books are a series of books published by Cambridge University Press at regular intervals. They contain IELTS sample tests which are a good practice for IELTS learners to use as a reliable source for practicing. The researchers collected these graded samples from the set of Cambridge English IELTS Academic books from version 1 to the newest one – version 16. The compositions were graded, ranging from band 3.5 to 8.0. The details of these compositions are listed in the chart 1 below:



### *Design of the Study*

The study is conducted to find out (1) the difference in the frequencies of using single-clause sentences (SS) and multi-clause sentences (MS) by IELTS candidates according to the writing band score; (2) discover whether there is any relationship between the number of single-clause sentences and the writing band score.

The design applied in this research is descriptive comparative and quantitative analysis methods. To address research question 1, the researchers used descriptive comparative to describe how different IELTS candidates use single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences in their compositions according to the writing band score and make a comparison between the two usages to see the difference in the way of using single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences of candidates. Besides, to find the answer to research question 2, the researchers decided to use the quantitative method design with the help of SPSS software to find the correlation between the two variables. As mentioned in Creswell (2005), correlative is used to determine whether the relationship between 2 variables is positive, negative, or neutral. That is, if 2 variables, say X, and Y are directly proportional, inversely proportional, or are not related to each other.

### *Data collection & analysis*

Describing the procedure of the study, tools, and methods of analysis to respond to the research questions.

This research used a checklist as the instrument. To collect the data, the researchers used the documentation method. The researchers read the sample first. Then, the researchers divided 50 compositions into 2 categories in which one is smaller or equal to band 6.0 (including 25 compositions), and the other is above band 6.0 (including 25 compositions). Next, researchers began to identify and count the number of single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences used in compositions by candidates. The data were then put on a table with a column for each type of sentence. Finally, all data were put on the checklist tables to calculate the total number of each type of sentence and the total number of sentences in the composition as well. After collecting the data, the researchers analyzed the data by using statistical and descriptive analysis. First, the data was put into the percentage by the formula formed by the researchers for each category:

$$P_{SS} = \frac{N_{SS}}{N_S} \times 100\% \quad \text{and} \quad P_{MS} = \frac{N_{MS}}{N_S} \times 100\%$$

In which,  $P_{SS}$ : the percentage of single-clause sentences

$P_{MS}$ : the percentage of multi-clause sentences

$N_{SS}$ : total number of single-clause sentences

$N_{MS}$ : total number of multi-clause sentences

$N_s$ : total number of sentences

Next, the researcher compared the  $P_{SS}$  and  $P_{MS}$  calculated in the previous stage to figure out the frequencies of using single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences of IELTS candidates. Moreover, the researchers also found out the difference in using two types of sentences in two writing band score categories by making a comparison between the percentage of single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences used in compositions divided by band score.

Furthermore, to see if there is any significant relationship between the number of single-clause sentences and the writing band score, the researchers applied the software SPSS to run the bivariate Pearson Correlation. The researchers began to interpret the findings from the output by examining the correlation coefficient  $r$  and the  $p$ -value. Finally, the researchers came to a conclusion about the relationship between the number of single-clause sentences and the writing band score.

## Results/Findings and discussion

This section aims to present the findings of this research as scientific results. The collected data were calculated by the formula and analyzed by SPSS.21. According to data analysis, the general findings in line with the research questions are presented below:

### 1. What are the frequencies of different types of sentences in IELTS writing task 2 written by candidates?

**Table 1.** Data of different types of sentences in the range of 0 – 6.0 band (25 compositions)

$N_{SS}$	$N_{MS}$	$N_s$	$P_{SS}$	$P_{MS}$
171	219	390	43.8%	56.2%

The table above displays the information of numbers and percentages of the two types of sentences which are single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences, used in 25 IELTS writing task 2 compositions written by candidates. All these 25 compositions are graded by IELTS judges with the range from 0 to 6.0 band. As one can understand from the table, there are 171 single-clause sentences and 219 multi-clause sentences in 390 total sentences. The table also provides data of the percentages of single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences after making calculations, showing that the percentages of single-clause sentences are 43.8% and 56.2%.

**Table 2.** Number of different types of sentences in the range of 6.5 – 9.0 band (25 compositions)

$N_{SS}$	$N_{MS}$	$N_s$	$P_{SS}$	$P_{MS}$
99	285	384	25.8%	74.2%

The table above demonstrates the numbers and percentages of the single-clause and multi-clause sentences used in 25 IELTS writing task 2 compositions written by candidates. All these 25 compositions are graded by IELTS judges and categorized in the range from 6.5 to 9.0 band by the researchers. There are 99 single-clause sentences and 284 multi-clause sentences in 383 total sentences from the table. The table also shows that the number of single-clause sentences accounts for 25.8% and that of multi-clause sentences contributes a big proportion of 74.2%.

As can be seen from the two tables, after making calculations by using the formula mentioned above, the researchers had the results of the frequencies of the two types of sentences in the two categories divided beforehand. The percentages of single-clause and multi-clause sentences in the range between 0 and 6.0 bands are relatively equal with 43.8% and 56.2%, respectively. On the other hand, these percentages in the range of 6.5-9.0 have a significant difference. While there are 284 multi-clause sentences out of 383 sentences in total, which accounts for up to 74.2%, this percentage of single-clause sentences is just 25.8%, with 99 single-clause sentences out of the total number of sentences. Moreover, the two tables also show that with the same number of 25 compositions in both two categories, the number of total sentences of two categories is rather the same, which has 390 sentences in the range of 0 to 6.0 band and 383 sentences in the range of 6.5 to 9.0 band. Nevertheless, in spite of having nearly the same number of total sentences, there is a remarkable division in the use of single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences between the two categories, which can be clearly recognized from the number of each type of sentence or from their percentage number as well.

## *2. Is there a relationship between the use of single-clause sentences (SS) and IELTS writing task 2 band score?*

In terms of the second research question, the researchers began to conduct data analysis with the main support of the software SPSS.21.

**Table 3.** The use of single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences in IELTS writing task 2 compositions (N= 50)

Type	Min	Max	$\Sigma$	M	SD
<b>Total Sentence</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>15.48</b>	<b>5.23</b>
<b>SS</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>4.71</b>
<b>MS</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>504</b>	<b>10.06</b>	<b>2.85</b>

The use of single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences in the data set of 50 IELTS writing task 2 compositions are presented in Table 3. According to the findings, the entire data set has a sum of 774 sentences with a mean sentence value of 15.48 per composition and a standard deviation of 5.23. The table also shows that the longest composition has 40 sentences, and the shortest composition has 11 sentences. Multi-clause sentences appear to be the most frequently used sentence type, with a sum of 504 and a mean of 10.06 (SD= 2.85). The fewest number of multi-clause sentences in a composition is 4, and the greatest number of multi-clause sentences in a composition is 18. Single-clause sentences produce a sum of 270, a mean of 5.4,



and a standard deviation value of 4.71. Similarly, the fewest number of single-clause sentences in a composition is 0, and the highest number of single-clause sentences in a composition is 28.

**Table 4.** Distribution of IELTS writing task 2 band score within the data set (N=50)

Score	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	M	SD
3.5	1	2	5.75	1.44
4.0	4	8		
4.5	1	2		
5.0	5	10		
5.5	7	14		
6.0	7	14		
6.5	5	10		
7.0	11	22		
7.5	7	14		
8.0	2	4		

The score distributions for the IELTS writing task 2 compositions in the data set are displayed in Table 4. The table shows that the data set has a mean score of 5.75 with a standard deviation of 1.44. When frequencies and percentages are broken down according to scores, it is seen that the score of 7.0 has the highest percentage (22%) with a frequency of 11. The band score of 5.5, 6.0, and 7.5 are the second-highest percentage (14%) with a frequency of 7. The scores with lowest frequencies are 3.5 (with % = 2, f = 1) and 4.5 (with % = 2, f = 1) according to the findings.

The relationship between the frequency of single-clause sentences used in the set of data and the IELTS writing task 2 band score is shown in these two following tables, which are the results of bivariate Pearson Correlation conducted via the software SPSS.21.

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics of Single-clause Sentences (SS) and the IELTS writing band score (BS)

	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
SS	5.40	4.716	50
BS	6.21	1.191	50

Table 5 shows that the mean score of single-clause sentences is 5.40, and the standard deviation is 4.716. In terms of the band score, the mean score is 6.21, and the standard deviation is 1.191.

**Table 6.** Correlation findings of IELTS writing task 2 band score and the frequency of single-

Correlations			
		SS	BS
SS	Pearson Correlation	1	-.397**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	50	50
BS	Pearson Correlation	-.397**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	
	N	50	50

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

clause sentences.

The results of Pearson Correlation Analysis show that the correlation between single-clause sentences and band score is  $-.397$ . The significance level to three decimal places is  $.004$ . This means that the significance level is less than  $0.05$ . It can be concluded that the frequency of single-clause sentences has an insignificant negative relationship with the IELTS writing task 2 band score ( $r = -.397, p < 0.05$ ). In other words, IELTS writing task 2 compositions with more single-clause sentences are likely to have a lower band score.

## Discussion

First, to investigate the frequencies of single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences used by IELTS test-takers in writing task 2. Hence, the first research question - *What are the frequencies of single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences in IELTS writing task 2 written by the candidates?* - was formulated. Using the formula to figure the percentage of each sentence type shows that multi-clause sentences account for a remarkable amount in the collected IELTS compositions with the range from 0 to 6.0 band and from 6.5 to 9.0, especially the latter range include around three-fourths of this sentence type. However, this result seems not to share the conclusions with Saragih et al. (2020) and Sukandi and Merina (2017). They indicate that composers evince their interest in the simple sentence, single clause sentence in academic writing.

Second, to indicate whether sentence types related to grammar requirements in IELTS writing task 2 affect the test takers' band score. The second research question - *Is there a relationship between the use of single-clause sentences and IELTS writing task 2 band score?* - was posted. By analyzing Pearson Correlation, the correlation between single-clause sentences and band score is  $-.397$ , and the significance level is less than  $0.05$ . These results indicate that IELTS writing task 2 compositions with more single-clause sentences are likely to have a lower band score. Likewise, these compositions are not diversified with sentence types. Similarly, Demirezen (2013) concludes that lower-intermediate students usually struggle with recognizing types of sentences. They tend to produce single-clause sentences despite their desire for multi-clause ones. Handayani (2019) supports this disposition that most writers seem to struggle with

varying their use of sentences.

Based on the rubric, there is one criterion related to types of sentences which IELTS test-takers are suggested to use a variety of grammar structures. From that, it is clear that type of sentences is one of the grammatical criteria that IELTS examiners take into account to mark IELTS compositions

Upon the result of the study, it is suggested that IELTS test-takers still should pay attention to choosing types of sentences in their compositions and try to use a mix of various types of sentences instead of using only one type.

Apparently, instead of heavily relying on types of sentences, IELTS trainers had better notice their learners' fundamental mistakes such as misplaced modifiers, lack of subjects, disagreement between subject and verbs, etc. Consequently, IELTS learners can produce high-quality compositions with free-error sentences. Besides, IELTS trainers should execute suitably level-oriented lessons in order not to overwhelm their learners in terms of using lots of multi-clause sentences.

## Conclusion

This study aims to discover the difference in using two types of sentences (single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences) in two categories of IELTS writing band score (one from 0 to 6.0 and the other one – 6.5 to 9.0). Moreover, the researchers also examine whether there is any relationship between the frequency of single-clause sentences and the IELTS writing task 2 band score.

The results of the study show that there is a significant difference in using single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences in the two categories of band score by candidates. To be more specific, in the range of 0 to 6.0 band score, the percentages of single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences used by candidates are nearly the same with 43.8% and 56.2%, respectively. On the other hand, in the range of 6.5 to 9.0, candidates tend to use fewer single-clause sentences in their writing with the percentage of 25.8% compared to 74.2% of multi-clause sentences.

In terms of the relationship between the frequency of single-clause sentences and the IELTS writing task 2 band score, the findings indicate that there is a negative relationship between the two variables, but this relationship is not significant ( $r = -.397$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded that IELTS writing task 2 compositions with more single-clause sentences tend to be graded with lower band scores.

The study's findings reveal a link between sentence type and IELTS composition band score, implying that the more single sentences in a composition, the lower the band score. According to the rubric, there is one criterion linked to sorts of sentences in which IELTS test takers are advised to apply a variety of grammar structures. The majority of single-sentence compositions are found in low-band compositions, as evidenced by the data. As a result, it's apparent that one of the grammatical factors that IELTS examiners use while grading IELTS writings is the type

of sentences. As a result of the study's findings, IELTS test takers should continue to pay attention to the sorts of sentences they use in their compositions and strive to utilize a mix of different types of sentences rather than just one type. According to the findings, multi-clauses do not significantly improve candidates' band scores or their success in IELTS writing task 2. As a result, IELTS applicants should avoid utilizing this type of statement excessively. In terms of instructors, according to Tran et al. (2021), teacher-driven roles have been considered to be one of the most basic roles in helping students acquire the language. The first fundamental role is their instruction method, including the way they conduct the lessons. Instead of depending largely on sentence types, it appears that IELTS instructors should pay more attention to their students' fundamental errors, such as misplaced modifiers, a lack of subjects, a dispute between the subject and the verbs, and so on. As a result, IELTS students may write high-quality papers that are devoid of errors. Furthermore, IELTS instructors should deliver level-appropriate courses to avoid overwhelming their students with a large number of multi-clause phrases. Additionally, it should also be noted that the study is not without its limitations. First and foremost, the set of data is limited with the number of 50 compositions, which makes it hard to generalize the conclusion of this study. Moreover, the study's findings are also limited to the IELTS writing task 2 compositions. Therefore, similar analyses may produce different results with a bigger data set in other contexts. Last but not least, the variables in this study are limited to two types: single-clause sentences and multi-clause sentences, which makes a limitation in the lack of variety in types of sentences for the study. Therefore, other authors should make use of this gap to conduct their research with a clearer picture of sentence type variety in students' written essays.

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## Navigating the Turbulent Time: A Qualitative Inquiry into Resilience among Vietnamese ESL Teachers during COVID-19

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore the dynamics of the resilience process among Vietnamese ESL (English as the Second Language) university teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, this study investigated the interactions between risk factors and protective factors at both personal and contextual levels that shape teachers' resilience patterns. Fifteen teachers from different stages of teaching career participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews in qualitative research design, and the collected data were analyzed by means of a two-cycle analysis procedure. Findings of the study revealed two major risk factors, including *turbulence and ambiguity* and *decreasing autonomous motivation*. Despite this, teachers drew on three primary resources to adapt to the abrupt changes: *positive imaginaries about the future*, *sense of professionalism*, and *relational resources*. Analysis showed that these protective factors were located across personal level and microsystems; however, there were missing links for protective resources at institutional level, mesosystems, and macrosystems. Taking cognizance of this, the study emphasizes the role of transparent policies and school leadership in bolstering teachers' resilience in adversities.

#### Keywords:

resilience; teacher burnout; Covid-19 pandemic; ESL teachers; teacher retention

### Introduction

Concerns have been escalating over the issue of teacher shortage at both national and international scales. Approximately 70 million teachers' job posts have to be filled and retained globally if the development goals of quality, inclusive education set by the United Nations are to be fulfilled (Kangas-Dick, & O'Shaughnessy, 2020). However, the issue of teacher recruitment and retention has undergone an unexpected crisis internationally (Avalos & Valenzuela, 2016), for reasons related to burgeoning workloads, excessive bureaucracy, lack of support, disruptive students' behaviors, and changing the social status of the teaching profession

(Manfield et al., 2016). Teacher burnout and attrition imply severe consequences economically, academically, and psychologically by causing a negative school climate and lowering academic performance (Kraft, Marinell, & Shen-Wei Yee, 2016).

In this context, sustaining teachers' resilience is critical in helping teachers manage stress, pressure and remain in their profession (Flores, 2018). Broadly speaking, resilience refers to the capability to adapt positively to challenges and adversities and to maintain well-being despite stress (Luther et al., 2000). In alignment with Luther's model, this study views resilience as an ongoing dynamic process instead of a fixed personality trait that is pertinent to individuals. The notion of resilience is especially relevant in the present situation, as the Covid-19 pandemic has caused turbulence and disruptions in many fields, including education, and created increasing stress and pressures on teachers at all levels. This calls for a need to explore the resilience pattern that operates among teachers during these adversities.

Although the construct of resilience has been widely investigated in psychology (e.g., Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012), this is a relatively new concept in education and thus needs further investigation in different settings and contexts. Furthermore, much of the extant literature on teacher resilience has gravitated towards the early stages of the teaching career, and thus the experiences in other phases of teaching are still under-presented.

Taking cognizance of this, the present study expands the existing literature by shedding light on the dynamics of resilience factors that influence ESL university teachers in the Covid-19 pandemic in the Vietnam context. The Covid-19 situation poses an interesting case to look into the pattern of resilience: unlike other creeping educational phenomena such as neoliberalism, the pandemic has been a sudden incident bringing about unexpected disruptions in every educational aspect.

## Literature review

### *Resilience*

Resilience, a psychological concept recently imported to educational research, is “a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (Luther et al., 2000, p. 543). In a more recent definition, resilience is construed as “the sum of an individual’s abilities that allow him or her to bounce back from adversity and even thrive in the face of difficult times” (Kim & Kim, 2017, p.2). In the field of education, teacher resilience refers to what sustains teachers to survive and thrive in their profession and navigate in adversities or during turbulent times (Beltman et al., 2011).

While early conceptualizations conceive resilience as personal attributes, which are internal to a person and couched within their capacity, including motivation, self-efficacy, physical conditions, and resourcefulness (Masten et al., 1990), recent discourses describe resilience in the dynamic interaction of both personal and contextual factors (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Benard, 2004). Accordingly, resilience is not only attributed to psychological orientations but



also affected by social support systems such as family, friends, workplace, and social environments (Gu & Day (2007), Truebrigdge (2015).

### *Individual characteristics*

A large body of literature related to teachers' burnout, attrition, and retention has unraveled a number of individual risks and resources that may foster resilience among teachers and protect them from demotivation. Personal risk factors may involve insufficient self-efficacy, introversion and difficulties in seeking for help, and conflicts between teachers' beliefs and imaginaries and the realities of school practices (Beltman et al., 2011). Despite this, teachers can draw on a number of personal protective factors, including autonomous motivation, conscientiousness, openness, self-efficacy, and relational resources (e.g., Day & Gu, 2009) in order to survive and thrive in difficult times. For example, Bowles & Arnup (2016) argue for a positive correlation between teachers' sustained commitment to teaching and such characteristics such as adaptability, orientation towards optimism, and locus of control. In another recent study, Ainsworth & Oldfield (2019) point out the critical role of self-esteem, life orientation, and emotional intelligence in improving teachers' well-being and retention.

### *Contextual characteristics*

Emergent evidence in the body of literature has suggested that contextual factors may have an overriding role in determining the level of job satisfaction and resilience among teachers (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019). Contextual risk factors vary significantly within the curriculum, school, family, or professional contexts. As regards school contexts, it has been reported that demanding and heavy workloads, combined with the pressure to fulfill various, or even, conflicting roles at school, have pushed many teachers to the critical point of exhaustion (Richards et al., 2018). Furthermore, teachers also suffer stress and demotivation from disruptive students' behavior and negative teacher-student relationship (Greenberg et al., 2016). Another source of risks comes from increasing accountability-based education across all levels, which results in a lower sense of autonomy and self-efficacy among teachers (Datnow & Park, 2018; Greenberg et al., 2016). More importantly, lack of support from school leaders and administration plays a pivotal role in causing teachers' burnout and attrition (Flores, 2018).

Family contextual constraints primarily focus on maintaining a balance between family and work commitments, lack of necessary facilities at home, or little support from family members (Fleet et al., 2007). Professionally, low self-esteem and lack of social recognition regarding professional values may lower the possibility of teachers remaining in their jobs (Aujila-Bhullar, 2018).

On the opposite end of the spectrum, a variety of contextual protective factors have been proven to bolster resilience among teachers. One element is related to strong leadership and a positive school atmosphere, which contributes to teachers' well-being (Ellison & Mays-Woods, 2019). Specifically, different studies have established a relationship between favorable school ambience (e.g. perceived job security, professional development, and level of school support) and teachers' turnover rate and students' achievement (Richards et al., 2016). In addition,

supportive and trusting relationships with leaders, colleagues, family, friends, and reinforcement from professional networks also serve as important social support in adversities (Olsen & Anderson, 2007). Another important protective factor is transparency in setting role expectations and clear targets for teachers' performance (Belknap & Taymans, 2015).

In sum, varied personal and contextual factors have been identified in the body of literature in relation to teachers' resilience. However, more empirical evidence is needed to understand the interactive patterns between the risk factors and protective factors in different adverse contexts (Flores, 2018). While the Covid-19 pandemic has posed additional challenges and threats to the already stretched conditions experienced by teachers worldwide, it also creates unique dynamics of personal and contextual dimensions in teachers' resilience.

### *Teachers' resilience amidst the Covid-19 pandemic*

Previous studies have revealed the dynamics of varied personal and contextual factors in the Covid-19 pandemic context. For example, in an investigation into Canadian teachers' attitudes in the Covid-19 disruptions, Sokal, Trudel, and Babb (2020) revealed a positive relationship between the college teachers' resilience and their attitudes. To be more specific, the teachers' cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes towards change, technology, and administrative support positively correlated with their sense of accomplishment and resilience. In another study, Bento et al. (2021) found that Brazilian teachers' resilience depended on their individual adaptive processes and communication processes, which facilitated the interaction between previous knowledge and the emergent requirements in this disruptive time.

In a recent study regarding Vietnam's educational contexts, Nguyen and Nguyen (2021) elaborated on several factors bolstering resilience capability in one foreign language institution, which encompassed "clear directions from the top-level stakeholders, the mutual cooperation between relevant faculties and departments, and the initiatives taken by supporting and teaching staff to suit the local context's conditions" (p.48). Nguyen and Nguyen (2021) also found out that teachers' willingness to adopt change and technology during the Covid-19 pandemic (i.e. using video conferencing) was influenced by several factors such as "effort expectancy, hedonic motivation, and habit" (p.12). This finding is related to another study conducted by Ly, Nguyen, and Nguyen (2021), wherein factors such as regulated environment, teachers' technology literacy, and the suitability of the tools were found to determine teachers' level of adaptation to the crisis.

The aforementioned studies have illustrated the dynamics of teachers' resilience during the Covid-19 crisis, which needs illumination from further empirical evidence. In addition, the perspectives and experiences of Vietnamese teachers as the major stakeholders in Vietnam's education have still been underrepresented in the body of literature. This research seeks to fill this gap by exploring the resilience patterns among Vietnamese ESL teachers in the Covid-19 pandemic.

### *Research Questions*

To fulfill the purpose of the study, a qualitative design was conducted to seek answers to the following questions:

1. How do ESL teachers describe their personal and contextual risk factors during the turbulent time caused by the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. How do these teachers draw on personal and contextual resources to cope with these risk factors and remain resilient?

## **Methods**

### *Research context & Participants*

This study was carried out at a Foreign Language Faculty of a public university in Vietnam, as the country was undergoing a fourth lockdown period due to the Covid-19 outbreak. In this context, all university courses were being conducted fully online. Although this was not the first time that online teaching and learning was required on an ad hoc basis in response to the contagious disease, this lockdown was by far the longest.

The participants were fifteen ESL teachers (eight females, seven males), with ages ranging from 28 to 34 and with two to eight years of teaching experience. A convenience sampling technique was employed as the basis of participant selection, which draws on availability, accessibility, and willingness on the part of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). All the teachers had been working for the university for at least two consecutive years and had been engaged in online teaching for several semesters.

For ethics considerations, participant information was sent to all prospective interviewees to provide basic information regarding the purposes of the study, the level of participants' engagement, and the potential risks. Written consent was sought before each interview session, and clarifications were given concerning the voluntary nature of the study and the strategies with which all the collected data will be treated to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The interviews were conducted in English to avoid any loss of meaning that might occur during the translation process.

### *Design of the Study*

This study aims to understand varied personal and contextual risk and protective factors that may interfere in the resilience process of Vietnamese ESL teachers during the turbulent Covid-19 outbreak. Due to its exploratory nature, the study employed a qualitative research design with in-depth semi-structured interviewing as the primary data collection method. Qualitative studies, as explained in Creswell and Poth (2016), help to understand “a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (p.2).

### *Data collection & analysis*

Data collection was performed employing in-depth semi-structured interviews, which endow teachers with opportunities to extrapolate on their experiences and perspectives while still maintaining the overall pattern of study focus. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews embrace elements of flexibility and openness, giving spaces for probes and follow-up questions to facilitate in-depth understanding (Wellington, 2000). The participants were required to give a general description regarding the courses they were teaching and the experiences they encountered during this time. In the following main questions, the teachers were asked to describe the factors that facilitated or hindered them from remaining resilient. Accordingly, aspects of personal characteristics, workplace characteristics, social circumstances, and social and family relationships were drawn into consideration to comply with the personal and contextual dimensions of teachers' resilience.

The interview protocols began with the list of interview questions being sent out to the participants prior to the interview so that the teachers would have more time for reflection and feel more comfortable at the interview. Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, all interviews were conducted online via the MS Teams platform and were recorded with the participants' consent. Each interview lasted for about 50-60 minutes. After initial analysis, pieces of data that were ambiguous or conflicting were sorted out, and emails were sent to relevant participants to seek clarification.

The collected data were transcribed verbatim and followed a two-cycle analysis procedure as suggested by Saldaña (2013). In the initial cycle, a combination of different coding strategies, including In Vivo coding, descriptive coding, and process coding, was employed to explore various nuances of the data and to identify emergent codes. Thereafter, these codes were further refined and then grouped under overarching categories. In the second cycle, major themes from the data were drawn by means of pattern coding. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), pattern codes are "explanatory or inferential codes that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation" and are processed by condensing data into "a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis" (p.69).

Several strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of a qualitative study design. Firstly, the data were coded and recoded so that the subtle nuances of interview data could be revealed. Analytic memos were kept during the study as a means to record personal reflection and positionality during the process. Secondly, the codes and themes were then cross-checked by one colleague who was experienced in qualitative coding. Furthermore, the teachers were informed that they could add, rectify, or withdraw any information in the interviews if they felt that it no longer represented themselves and their experiences. A rich and thick description of the data was provided, accompanied by direct quotations from the participants' narratives wherever necessary.

## Results/Findings and discussion

The purpose of the present study is to explore the teaching experiences of Vietnamese university teachers during the Covid-19 lockdown in order to find out different risk and protective factors that shape their resilience. The analysis elaborates on the major themes couched in the interview data by, firstly, explaining two main areas of challenges shared by the teachers and then extrapolating on personal and contextual resources that teachers drew on to survive and thrive.

### *Risk factors experienced by ESL teachers*

Thematic analysis of the interview data reveals two major challenges that ESL teachers had to cope with during the Covid-19 pandemic.

### *Turbulence and ambiguity*

Findings show that the Covid-19 outbreak incurred great ‘turbulence’ and tangible changes in many aspects of university education. A large part of teachers’ narratives pivoted around the unexpected changes they experienced in pedagogies, teaching platforms, and assessment policies, as expressed in the following extract.

TAM: It was full of turbulence at first. Everything went online: teaching, testing, communication... We needed to change teaching methods, lesson plans, make many test versions. Policies changed all the time, and sometimes we didn't know what to do [...] I believe the English language should be taught face-to-face to have better interaction.

These disruptions from the normal routine of teaching, learning, and assessment put teachers in many negative emotional states such as 'alertness', 'worry', and 'stress', and rendered them in constant ambiguity: 'We didn't know what was going to happen next or 'We planned to have the test online, but were aware that they could be offline'.

This part of the analysis reflects Flores' description (2018) about how adversities such as social changes and economic crises can profoundly influence schools and teachers' lives through drastic changes in policies and curriculum. One interesting nuance of the pandemic's influence on teachers is the lack of role transparency in this awkward time:

GIA: Everything is blurred. Sometimes I am not sure what my role is anymore and what is expected from me. Do I need to maintain the normal quality of the course? Do students have to meet the course outcomes as usual? If I stick to the norms, then students will fail [...] If I force them to learn, they'll get bored and complain [...] And then I need to help students have lots of communication and Interactions in online platforms. You know, I teach English. So how can I negotiate?

This finding suggests a relationship between ambiguity and increasing confusion and pressure among teachers. As discussed in Belknap & Taymans (2015), when teachers experience insufficient or conflicting information concerning their role and their expected performance at school, they seem to withstand a greater level of stress and burnout, and this will interfere with their resilience.

### *Decreasing autonomous motivation*

During the interviews, many teachers emanated an increasing level of demotivation during this turbulence. One of the most important sources of this originated from burgeoning workloads and multiple administrative tasks that teachers had to cope with.

QUAN: There are tons of things to do that I feel it would never end. Many overlapping training workshops online, lots of paperwork especially for tests, many new rules to learn [...] We also need to spend more time on lesson preparation, making videos and interactive lessons online for example [...] We also need to take care of students much more – explaining the lessons again and again since many of them don't pay attention and don't understand, do a lot of reports why they cannot attend classes or why they drop out. And then meetings for hours on end... and exam invigilation too! It's just too much!

Another source of demotivation comes from the fact that teaching increasingly became a top-down process rather than personal creativity when it went online. Concerns over online teaching and learning led to greater accountability and control over teachers' work, which was manifested in strictly monitored learning outcomes, homogeneous pedagogies, and uniformed tests. As a result, many teachers expressed a lack of autonomy and control over their own teaching, which resulted in decreasing motivation.

The encroachment of neoliberalism in the field of education has been widely discussed in the literature (e.g., Goodson, 2010; Gray et al. (2018)). Neoliberalism supports the values of free trade, privatization, and knowledge market (Peters, 2010), and it entails the imposition of a top-down curriculum, increasing accountability by employing accountable exams to measure success, and introducing benchmarks and standards for education evaluation (Goodson, 2010). Accordingly, the neoliberal approach to education has exerted great stress and pressure on teachers. Furthermore, from the result of the present study, it is likely that the workloads were aggravated when all teaching courses unexpectedly went online. Several teachers expressed increasing burden when this was combined with increasing 'family commitments' and 'financial constraints' in the Covid-19 contexts. This finding is significant since research has suggested negative influences of ongoing stress and pressure on teachers' autonomous motivation, which in turn adversely affects their professional development (Pelletier & Rocchi, 2016).

### *Personal and contextual resources employed to cope with risk factors*

Despite the aforementioned challenges and risks experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic, all teachers make use of personal and other resources to help them overcome the adversities and remain in the profession.

### *Positive imaginaries about the future*

One of the pervading factors that sustained the teachers in this tough time was the inclination towards optimism and hope prevalent in most narratives. A majority of teachers believed that this present situation was temporary and the future would behold brighter scenarios for both teachers and students.

NGOC: It will not be the same forever. Covid-19 will be contained, and everything will come back to normal soon. I believe things can be much better compared to the past, as we [teachers] can now learn new skills in teaching, have new pedagogies, and students somewhat learn to be more independent. Even though it cannot be the same as it was in the past, we will soon adapt to it.

Other teachers expressed appreciation for this opportunity, which helps them become 'more flexible and more adaptive to changes. The idea of 'turning challenges into opportunities' was reiterated across the interview scripts and thus could reflect the teachers' attitudes towards this event. As Bullough and Hall-Keynon (2011) pointed out, hope and optimism are critical in sustaining teachers in difficult times and helping them navigate challenges. This part of the analysis also reveals the increasing sense of efficacy that accompanies teachers' optimistic perspective. The teachers expressed great belief in their improved teaching skills and strategies, problem-solving skills, and self-directed learning capability.

### *Sense of professionalism*

Besides hope, most teachers admitted that the factor that helped them move forward was their commitment to the teaching career and a desire to make changes to education and students' lives. Some teachers described fulfilling experiences embedded in their teaching profession.

SON: For me, what gives me the strength to overcome many challenges is my passion for teaching and the job of teaching. Yes, I know the salary is low, workloads are so heavy, especially during this time of Covid-19. But I have never regretted being a teacher. I think in this kind of profession, we are doing so many meaningful things. And I love seeing my students improve and develop every day.

HANH: What keeps me in this job is my students. Sometimes they lack motivation, and it makes me feel down. But most of the time, I like teaching them. It makes me feel young and full of energy. Sometimes they can be so inspiring. Anyway, communicating with students can be fun and less complicated than in other professions.

Put simply, the teachers emanated a strong sense of vocation in their profession and a good understanding of their responsibilities and level of engagement as teachers. This finding accords with earlier observations (e.g., Flores, 2018; Galea, 2018), which showed that students as sources of motivation could contribute to teachers' sense of professionalism and, in turn, bolster resilience in challenging working contexts.

### *The role of relational resources*

In accordance with the results of other studies, participants primarily drew on different types of support from their friends, family, and social networks to help them sustain in this context. However, while previous studies emphasized school leadership as a significant contextual resource (Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020), this study has not been able to demonstrate this role in teachers' perception, except for many training sessions. Most of the participants referred to family, friends, and colleagues as great sources of support during the Covid-19

outbreak.

MAI: I am lucky to have family, friends, and my colleagues shared with me during this difficult time. The school does give me many pieces of training, and they are helpful. But I actually learned a lot from my colleagues. Previously, I didn't believe in group works in teaching, but now we plan the lessons together, and I feel I am not alone. My husband also gives me a lot of encouragement and support in many ways [...] I feel blessed from all of this.

Previous studies have argued for the critical role of supportive relationships in building capacity for resilience among teachers (Peters & Pearce, 2012). Especially, stable family support and strong informal, supportive relationships have been proven to help teachers sustain their teaching commitments against challenges (Papatraianou and Le Cornu, 2014). In fact, insufficient support from different relationships has been cited as one of the most popular reasons for teachers' turnover and attrition. Gu and Li (2013) point out that "teachers' worlds are made up of multi-layered relationships" (p. 298), and these inter-related relations are vital in positively or negatively shaping their capacity for resilience.

Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy (2020) categorize protective factors into different levels of a holistic system: personal level; 'microsystems' (including interpersonal relationships and different social roles played by the teachers); 'mesosystems' (comprised of two or more microsystems); and 'exosystems' (including two or more contextual settings) (p.132). These multi-layer protective factors interact with each other to bolster teachers' levels of resilience. However, the results of this study do not demonstrate this holistic system in full. Rather, it seems that relationships at the institution level were not activated, and school communities, working culture (mesosystem) and relevant policies (exosystem) did not serve as protective factors for teachers to survive and thrive in this tough time. These missing links might explain for continuous teachers' burnout and attrition found in this study.

## Conclusion

This explorative study set out to discover patterns of risk factors and protective factors that shape teachers' capacity for resilience in the turbulence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Results of the study confirmed the inter-relations of personal and contextual dimensions in these factors. Broadly speaking, the ESL teachers suffered from increasing ambiguity and complications from changing educational contexts. Besides this, burgeoning workloads and escalating top-down control on every aspect of teaching and learning derived teachers of creativity and autonomous motivation. As emphasized by Deci and Ryan (2000), prolonging stress and pressure from jobs can exhaust autonomous motivation and deform it into controlled motivation or even demotivation. Despite these prevalent risk factors, teachers also drew on different protective resources to navigate the challenges. These resources came from personal factors such as optimism, hope, and a sense of professionalism and from contextual factors such as support from their close relations. However, the findings did not prove the pivotal role of institutions and wider culture and policies in helping teachers survive and thrive.



Sustaining teachers' resilience during adversities such as during the Covid-19 pandemic is critical to improving teachers' retention and decreasing turnover. The findings of this study draw attention to a significant gap in the protective system for teachers. Specifically, this paper emphasizes the role of transparent policies and school leadership in reducing teachers' burnout and ensuring their well-being. In other words, fostering supportive relationships at the institutional level, meso level, and exo-level is important in this tough time.

This study strengthens the idea that resilience is not pertinent to a person's characteristics and is a process that is shaped and reshaped by the interaction of different factors. The key strength of the study lies in the in-depth understanding of the target phenomenon due to its exploratory nature. However, the limited number of participants in qualitative research design also means limited generalization of the research results. Therefore, it is suggested that further studies would be conducted among participants with different backgrounds so as to identify the resilience patterns of teachers in adversities.

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## Biodata

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## The Effects of Collaborative Writing to Learners' Text in terms of Writing Accuracy from Sociocultural Theory Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords:

collaborative writing, individual writing, writing accuracy

Collaborative Writing (CW) has stimulated scholars for years in order to shed light on the effects of this kind of activity, and in terms of writing fluency, some researchers succeeded in stating that writing in groups affects the quality of learners' texts. Nevertheless, the previous studies have not provided fully spotlight on the field of utilizing grammar and vocabulary correctly when students compose text with peers. The purpose of this study was to review the effects of CW to the learners' work in terms of accuracy from the perspective of Sociocultural Theory (SCT).

### Introduction

Sociocultural Theory (SCT) (Vygotsky, 1978 as cited in Marginson & Dang, 2017) plays an important role in learning language generally and especially in the form of collaborative writing (CW) due to the constructs of this theory. Indeed, from the perspective of language instruction (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001), together with VanPattern & Williams (2014), advocated that the application of SCT in classroom communicative activities greatly supports teachers and learners in general. In greater detail, according to Storch (2012), from a "sociocultural theoretical perspective," interaction gives learners opportunities to enhance their language under the setting of feedback and communication. Moreover, Pham (2021) stated that the notion of "communicative language teaching" was introduced the first time in the 1970s, and since then, this term has been applied in pedagogy with the form of pairs and later in groups-setting of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Accordingly, there apparently appears the need to apply the SCT in the process of instructing and learning languages.

Although CW has been researched for years until now, scholars have still been stimulated by this approach's accuracy effectiveness. Previous studies on the effects of CW on student writers' text indicated that this kind of learning activity greatly affects positively interaction (feedback) between mentors and students as well as among learners and writing fluency (Storch, 2018; Pham, 2021), whereas, the other researchers implied that CW leads to the result of being better

at accuracy alternatively grammar and vocabulary (McDonough et al., 2019; Kim & Emeliyanova, 2021). Therefore, this study focuses on the accuracy of CW simultaneously grammar and vocabulary.

Researching and applying SCT in the form of CW led to some certain achievements. In fact, Shehadeh (2011) conducted a study and concluded that CW greatly affects the content and organization of learners' text. Moreover, Yan(2019)'s study proved that CW provided learners opportunities to better their critical thinking and writing efficiency, as well. All things considered, SCT in form of CW has been considered to be effective. The aim of this paper is to shed a light on the effectiveness of CW to the students' writing quality in terms of accuracy by reviewing the relatedly previous articles. In addition, under the circumstance of the covid-19 pandemic, discussion on the awareness and suggestions for further research in fields are stated to be necessary.

## Literature reviews

The sociocultural theory has been applied in the form of collaborative writing due to the communicative features of interaction in numerous classes for years since this tool has really helped learners enhance their capabilities in some fields such as writing fluency (Storch, 2018), learners participation (Jelodar & Farvardin, 2019) and text organization (Shehadeh, 2011). From the perspective view of SCT, that writing in groups better students' texts can be explained due to the ZPD and scaffolding, which are constructs of this theory. Although there were few studies that proved the effective impact of CW, the accuracy aspect of writing still needs to provide opportunities to be revealed.

Some scholars have reviewed the notion, principles, and constructs of SCT for a long time. Lantolf, Thorne and Poehner (2006, pp.207-226 as cited in VanPattern & Williams, 2014) reported that SCT developed by the well-known psychologist Vygotsky and his colleagues was a "new way of thinking about human" at that time; the authors indicated that Vygotsky argued that mental system of the human comprises "lower-level neurobiological base" whilst the "higher cultural tools" combine with the lower base to mediate between the person and the environment, more importantly, between each person and the "social-material world"; and language is an artifact for the human to contact with others of human, which children subordinating matured persons learn from community to regulate their behaviors. Besides, Marginson & Dang (2017) also implied from the SCT. Any child's oral language was created to communicate with other people, which is significant for human development. The authors also emphasized the importance of society's impact on individual thinking. In addition, VanPattern & Williams (2014) reported that Vygotsky concluded the notion of internalization, which means through the artifacts, the child's cultural development appears firstly between people (inter-psychological) and secondly within the child (intra-psychological). Briefly, SCT discusses the mental functions of humans as mediation through the context of utilizing the artifacts, including languages, to self-regulate.

As prior mentioned, the theory is associated with the symbolic system that humans can generate and utilize named language; this tool is a mediation for each person to connect with the world and regulate human behaviors. It does happen thanks to ZPD- the construct of the theory, which could be delivered as there exists a gap between the actual development stage which was defined as the capability of individually solving problems, and potential one that was stated as problem-solving with adults' guidance or through the communication with abler peers. (Vygotsky, 1978 as cited in VanPattern & Williams, 2014). With the spotlight from the study, then appears the term scaffolding. In fact, this notion refers to some strategies like hints, modeling, or graphic organizer in order to support the learners. In fact, there is a correlation between scaffolding and ZPD. Indeed, the students can be helped by the instructor as well as peers with some techniques like above in the context of communication. Through the language humans use for interaction, the individual regulates himself or herself to extend his/her capability to the potential zone, which is exactly the ZPD; and the process of transferring the information from other members to a certain learner is internalization. Shortly, ZPD and scaffolding are associated with each other together with the SCT of Vygotsky. These also are the features that pedagogues have applied years with a form of groups work or pairs work with the name collaborative, especially writing.

Collaborative writing has widely been employed in classes by instructors with the activity of pairs work, and most groups work. A group might include three or more students who can generate a diversity of creative ideas. Davis (1993) suggested that the number of members in a group should be four or five whilst Csernica et al. (2002) offered the number of three or four. Working in a group, in this case, is that students work together to compose text through the processes of brainstorming, ideas discussion, composing, reviewing, and rewriting. Under no circumstance have group work activities shown as a good way to maintain and organize classes efficiently (Burke, 2011). Moreover, Wright & Lawson (2005) concluded that working in a group, students spend more time preparing for class and making conversation with the same team members and varied group members outside class. It can be revealed that students regulate behaviors of pre-writing, writing, and post-writing. Briefly, writing with group members encourages all students to develop skills, and deep learning makes this type of classroom activity the most significant. Accordingly, these features are stated to exist in collaborative writing due to the communication of individuals with group members.

It is that collaborative writing has been used on a wide scale because of the advantages, which are closely related to the SCT. Firstly, this activity may enable students to be more critical of argument and debate within this kind of community. In fact, Pham (2021) indicated the fact that some group-working students sometimes were not consensus due to various outlooks and responses. In addition, Ansarimoghaddam et al. (2017) withdrew that the disagreement regularly appears among members. Thereby, learners, through the setting of collaborative writing, try to prove their ideas and gradually become more confident and independent. These ideas show that the communication in language acquisition which was proved to be a process of development by Vygotsky, helps students regulate their ideas and also behaviors; the

individuals can enhance or develop the critical thinking ability- a sort of extending ZPD. Besides, learners' writing skills are bettered. Indeed, findings showed that written products of students working group could be improved (Shehadeh, 2011). Elola & Oskoz (2010) assumed “structure and organization improved” thanks to the discussion among members. Moreover, through members' comments (feedback), the author independently regulates the work (L. T. Nguyen & Pham, 2021), leading to improvement. Accordingly, these studies implied the process of transferring from inter-person to intra-person; besides, the tools that members support others can be the feedback or discussion that create the setting for scaffolding appearance, in another way writing in a group is one of SCT applications.

Researchers have studied the CW in an array of terms and aspects so that CW could be applied effectively for pedagogy; utilizing grammar and vocabulary (word choice inappropriate context and spelling) correctly requires students some certain skills and knowledge. In terms of bettering grammar, Shehadeh (2011) stated that through the text composed by the participants before and after the study, the grammar in the posttest writing was better compared with the pre-test products. The big picture for this circumstance is that through the discussion, the learners learned from their group members and regulated their work, which means rereading their own text and correcting some potential grammatical mistakes. Besides, in order to give corrective feedback, the viewers had to meet the standard of being efficient adequately to write informative feedback. Hence, this motivates the self-autonomy of every individual to do research on his or her own about the problem and then figure out solutions. Similarly, writers and reviewers from each group support bilaterally and simultaneously in terms of vocabulary. After the pre-writing process of brainstorming and outlining, the writers begin composing the products. In this phase, he/ she might have difficulty utilizing the correct word for appropriate collocation, sense, and context. That at this stage, the writer individually solves this problem, which possibly leads to the mistake of being misunderstood under a certain context. With the discussion about the work occurring during and after composing text process of CW, peers contribute the accuracy of using suitable words together with the correct spelling of colleagues' text. The idea that CW under setting of mobile assisted language learning (MALL) was considered an enhancing vocabulary tool was raised by Mohammed Hassan Al-Ahdal (2021). In short, CW shows the potential ability of affecting positively the accuracy of grammar and vocabulary of students' work.

The CW, which was mentioned, has been proliferated in numerous studies as the researcher has investigated the effectiveness of this method for years (Ranjbar & Ghonsooly, 2017; Kim & Emeliyanova, 2021; Pham, 2021). Researchers have proved the positive effect of CW on learners' text as when the students engage in composing, revising text together, the CW provides learners chances to interact and support all under context of discussion and feedback. Thereby, all members benefit from others' knowledge and skills.

Related to the SCT, Ranjbar & Ghonsooly (2017) investigated the effect of metaphor scaffolding constructs in research under the setting of collaborative writing. Twenty-four students learning English at the intermediate level who were Persian native speakers contributed



to the data of the study. It was compulsory for all the writers who were randomly assigned to the course to have passed the paragraph writing test prior to the course. Besides, the writers also obtained the standard score according to the researchers' intention through TOEFL test. All the participants were divided into two classes with different treatments. The experimental class was instructed with peer-scaffolding randomly, while the control class was lectured traditionally during 16 sessions. The data was also collected pre-test and posttest. The study was employed with two male students whose mother tongue is Persian. They were learning English translation at a university in Iran. Two participants played the role of reader and writer to review the composition randomly and unintendedly. They read the composition which was written by one of them without knowing about that and review together with some written comments. The method of reviewing is dialogue, and then the recorded transcript was grouped into a unit for discourse analysis. The findings showed that the learners took part in reviewing the text at the end of the session actively. Accordingly, this process-reviewing of writing with the feedback from peers is one portion of CW that can support learners regulate the work in order to better the quality of the product. Remarkably, the authors stated that the collaborative writing setting contributes to improving the quality of students' text. By showing the effects of one phase of CW on the quality of students' text, the researchers indicated that the CW generally enhances writing aspects, including unity, coherence, grammar, spelling, and vocabulary- the easily coming across a mistake, which requires further study to shed light on.

In addition, Kim & Emel'yanova (2021) studied the behaviors of collaborative and individual revision students after an 8-week session. During the course, thirty-six English intermediate level learners who were taking an intensive program in America, of course, named finished "four timed essay" (Kim & Emel'yanova, 2021). With the division of eighteen students in each group- the experiment and the control group from four full-time English as the second language (ESL) classes, the learners in the experimental group learned with the dynamic method of peers' feedback while the control group students studied with the path of individual correction. The pre-test record showed that most of the participants had taken the TOEFL or IELTS examination and they had to maintain GPA over 2.5 to enroll the course. The researchers presented the error system code to learners for sequence data analysis, moreover, the instructors also explained the error correction to the learners. All the students coming from both groups had to compose four or five-paragraph essay, which was designed by IETLS standard and orientation in fifty minutes at class. The students in experimental group would receive the product the following week with the written comments and writers were asked to make revision over the mistake. The instructor explained rubric of errors in terms of coherences, unity and cohesion. The products were marked with the comment function in Microsoft word to show the errors of lexical, grammar and syntactic. Meanwhile, the learners in traditional group were given 10 or 15 minutes to individually revise. In contrary, the experiment students had 20 to 25 minutes to discuss in pairs and revise the work mutually. From the products collected, the data was analyzed and the findings showed that peer feedback activities of CW group helped the students correct errors like part of speech, fragment, word choice, and sentence structure. The result of mean from the data analysis indicated that the students in experimental group improved the writing skills

gradually. Moreover, according to the latest products, these students did not make mistake as they had had. However, the study should have been better if further the researchers had had mentioned the attention of learners in group of experiment toward the feedback as well as the combination of grammar and vocabulary accuracy enhancement. Briefly, written collaborative feedback- one of the factors of collaborative writing contribute to the improvement of students' text quality.

Recently, Pham (2021) conducted a study to explore the effectiveness of the CW on learners' writing fluency, and he also investigated the framework for students to write an argumentative essay with group members. Sixty-two sophomore English majors at a university from Ho Chi Minh City took part in the study. The students were divided into two groups: the experiment and the control. The learners had to enroll in two prior subjects writing one and writing two, as an oblige before taking part in this course of writing three. The study was carried out with a similar lecturer, the materials, the teaching method, and the treatment. While twenty-seven students from the control group composed argumentative essays individually after making up the outline in a group, thirty-five learners in the experimental group wrote essays collaboratively. Through the data collected by pre-test, posttest, and interview, the authors drew the conclusion that collaborative writing helps students improve their writing fluency in terms of the length of the essay in fixed time with both collaborative and individual writers. Besides, the researcher also added that students joined in the writing process activity such as brainstorming, discussion, outlining, composing, and reviewing, which helped the lecturer organize the class. This finding was an invention for teachers of a framework to conduct classroom activity.

Moreover, the research argued that the learners had a positive attitude to CW, which motivated students in study as this method provides them opportunities to better the text and writing skills. Nevertheless, the study did not mention the group working skills that play an important role in collaborative writing. Moreover, the author pointed out that the disagreement in the group gave a chance to create a forum to argue and better critical thinking, yet the negative side or side effects still need further studying. Briefly, the study showed that CW affects writing fluency effectively, and it is a framework for lecturers to motivate students both in the classroom and outside academic institutions.

## Discussion

The preceding mentioned articles imply the positive impact of CW on students' texts' quality in terms of accuracy, which is in line with the SCT (as cited in Peregoy & Boyle, 2001; VanPattern & Williams, 2014; Ranjbar & Ghonsooly, 2017) through the process of interaction. Nonetheless, the elementary grammar and vocabulary, which contribute to the accuracy hypothesis, remain unveiled. Even some studies stated CW greatly helps students improve grammar in writing (Shehadeh, 2011), others claimed that the component vocabulary of students was enhanced by CW (Mohammed Hassan Al-Ahdal, 2021); the previous studies

(Ranjbar & Ghonsooly, 2017; Kim & Emeliyanova, 2021; Pham, 2021) still did not fill the gap of whether the CW improve both vocabulary and grammar.

In the circumstance of the covid-19 pandemic, the interaction process among students and instructors in meeting class is affected because the speech of each individual has to be made alternatively for order guarantee. Nguyen et al. (2021) conducted a study to explore the factors having an impact on the quality of online learning. The authors advocated that the quality of this learning process is under the influence of internet connection as well as interrupted interaction. On the other hand, the effectiveness of online learning for collaborative studying was revealed negatively (Bui et al., 2021). However, the low computer skills and low internet connection led to the teammates' controversial issues. Nonetheless, the notion of integrating the technology suggested by Nguyen (2021) indicates that the framework of utilizing computer-based and other devices enhances learners' English competence outside the meeting class. This research is in line with the perspective of Tran (2021) that working in a group with social websites supports the interaction of students outside the classroom. For the mentioned research in this part, the writer considers the big picture of CW in online learning in the era of covid-19. Accordingly, further research should be considered to make things clear from thin air.

## Conclusion

All things considered, by reviewing the theme theory SCT and its constructs in combination with other related articles, this paper tries to figure out whether CW affects writing accuracy. Although the precede mentioned papers revealed that CW had had an impact on the writing element related to writing accuracy, this paper's author suggests that further experimental research needs conducting in order that spotlight should be provided in the thin air. Nonetheless, CW under the setting of E-learning currently raises concern for scholars due to the fact that the communicative features, as well as patterns in this method, remain unveiled.

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## Biodata

The author has experiences in instructing English for over ten years, now he is in 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.

## Determinants in Student Satisfaction with Online Learning: A Survey Study of Second-Year Students at Private Universities in HCMC

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### ABSTRACT

Due to the development of technology and the outbreak of COVID-19, many higher education institutions have employed online learning as a measure to the urgent situation. However, the sudden shift to complete online learning has a considerable impact on students. Therefore, maintaining student satisfaction with their learning experience is a significant issue for the stakeholders. From scientific perspectives, many researchers propose the importance of identifying factors influencing student satisfaction. Although many studies are dealing with this issue, few have succeeded in identifying determinants in student satisfaction with online learning in which online learning is a part of the school ecosystem. This research aimed at tackling this problem in the context of private universities in Ho Chi Minh city. Notably, 317 students from two private universities were involved in this survey study. The data were collected via online questionnaires and analyzed by using the PLS-SEM approach to examine which factors found in the literature were more dominant. The research findings indicated three determinants, including course effectiveness, providing knowledge and skills, and the sense of belonging. This result suggested that in order to increase student satisfaction with online learning in the current situation, these three determinants should be paid more attention by the stakeholders.

**Keywords:** online learning, student satisfaction, private universities, PLS-SEM

### Introduction

Nowadays, students' expectations, parents, and society have made a new setting for higher education institutions. Particularly, globalization has created a "marketplace" for all universities; in other words, students have more choices for their study with a possible balance between cost and quality (James, 2001). Therefore, many universities have promoted the student-customer focuses in order to meet students' expectations. Within these focuses, student satisfaction becomes the critical factor leading to the success of any higher education institution (Mark, 2013). However, student satisfaction is very complicated and varies among different

contexts (Elliott & Healy, 2001). As a result, it is necessary for any institution to examine their students' satisfaction carefully.

What is more, the whole world has witnessed a spread of pandemic Covid-19. It leads to other changes in every aspect of society, including higher education. The sudden shift from traditional classrooms to completely online classrooms has promoted online learning significantly than ever before (Candilas, 2021; Dhawan, 2020). Consequently, student satisfaction has continuously changed to adapt to the situation.

Currently, there are many studies on student satisfaction, especially at tertiary levels. Based on the form of the learning process, these researchers focus on two main areas: (1) traditionally face-to-face classrooms (Muhsin et al., 2020; Weerasinghe & Ratnayake, 2017; Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2018; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013), and (2) online learning (including different forms of online learning such as blended-learning, or utter online learning, etc.) (Baber, 2020; Nortvig et al., 2018; Prifti, 2020; Rahman et al., 2020). These studies propose many factors related to student satisfaction in higher education institutions, such as teaching/learning quality, interactions within the community, quality of the facilities, etc. Nevertheless, providing that a study focuses on student satisfaction toward online learning at a particular institution, the factors listed are relevant to online learning components only. In other words, the other factors involving the whole school system are not included.

Online learning has been started in Vietnam for a long time; however, serious attention on this form of learning remains a question. Specifically, few universities have promoted this kind of learning as an essential tool in their educational ecosystem (Pham & Tran, 2019). What is more, being identical with what has happened to education worldwide during the outbreak of Covid-19, there has been a rapid increase in the employment of online learning within higher education institutions (MOET, 2020b). MOET (Ministry of Education and Training) (2020a) also confirms the quick response from private sectors to the contemporary suspended learning due to this pandemic. Because of the sudden shift in the learning form, Maheshwari (2021) states that many Vietnamese universities concern how students perceive this and how this can affect their satisfaction. In combination with all issues above, it is crucial to investigate the student satisfaction towards online learning as a part of the school ecosystem in the Vietnamese context.

## Literature review

### *Student satisfaction*

First of all, satisfaction is a complex construct of how the customers evaluate the product after using it and then make a relationship with their expectation of that product (Oliver, 1981). In education fields, especially in higher education, Elliott and Healy (2001) define satisfaction as the experience of students when they start their education until they graduate and afterward. Also, they indicate that students feel satisfied when their academic experience or performance matches their expected outcomes of choosing a particular program or institution. From another

perspective, Aldridge and Rowley (1998) categorize students' satisfaction into two main measurable domains: (1) the teaching and learning process, and (2) complete students' experience. In this research, the definition of student satisfaction is employed as the "total student experience" (Aldridge & Rowley, 1998) in the online learning environment.

### *Online learning*

#### *Definition of online learning*

In terms of its definition, online learning is defined by many authors. For example, Cojocariu et al. (2014) propose that online learning refers to the use of internet-connected computers to make learning happen anywhere and anytime. Therefore, this makes students the center of the learning process. Singh and Thurman (2019) share the same idea that online learning involves employing electronic devices with the Internet. In short, online learning proposes a kind of learning in which students learn in an environment created by using internet-supported devices as they learn in traditional classrooms. Within this environment, the students can have as many interactions as they can in the face-to-face classrooms.

#### *Online learning in the new situation of Covid-19*

These days, the outbreak of Covid-19 has promoted online learning worldwide. In other words, there is a considerable shift from traditional learning to partly or totally online learning (Dhawan, 2020; Hoang & Le, 2021; Tue & Le, 2021). International Association of Universities (2020) declares that the learning of nearly 1.5 billion students worldwide was postponed because of the effect of Covid-19 on the institutions. Also, the association report emphasizes the transformation of traditional classrooms into online ones as a measurement for the current situation. In the Vietnamese context, MOET (2020b) proposes that 110/240 higher education institutions have adopted online learning as a tool to make learning happen during the Covid-19 period. Significantly, among 110 institutions, approximately 70% belong to private sectors. MOET (2020b) also indicates that the in-time online training for both school staff and students assists in conducting online classroom via some popular online platforms such as Zoom, Google meet, MS Teams, and so forth. Additionally, to encourage other institutions to follow this trend, MOET (2020a) issued document No.1061/BGDĐT-GDTrH, which identifies and recognizes different forms of online learning.

### *Previous studies on factors influencing student satisfaction with the online learning environment*

Several authors list out some factors affecting student satisfaction, including Grade Point Average (Walker-Marshall & Hudson, 1999), student and school factors (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006; Ngo, 2021), quality of teachers, facilities, and technology implementation (Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013)(Ly et al., 2021), school environment, study major, and learning styles (García-Aracil, 2008), and also school reputation and ease of school entrance (Beerli Palacio et al., 2002). In a recent study, Al-Sheeb et al. (2018) present in detail five determinants affecting student satisfaction: Instructional Effectiveness and Academic Experience (how students percept the faculty, the teaching methodology, and the administration of the



course/program), Citizenship Knowledge and Skills (what is needed for a student to be a successful person), Sense of Belonging (the feeling toward the supporting, connecting, being respected by other members within the institutions), Interaction with Key Members (the contact with faculty, staff, and other students), and Awareness and Utilization of Campus Resources (the attitude towards the available school services such as classrooms, campus site, dorm, library, etc.). This study refers to these factors in order to build the conceptual framework for the study.

There have been few studies on student satisfaction in the online learning environment. In other words, most research is in favor of a face-to-face setting. Arbaugh (2001) adopts the model "Community of Inquiry framework" (Garrison et al., 1999), including social, cognitive, and teaching presences. Through the research, he adds two factors to the original framework: the design of the course and the organization. Stewart et al. (2004) employed the analysis of crucial factors to identify what affects student satisfaction. They conclude that there were several factors: the usage of a web page, technological aspects, online apps and tools, the online contents, and the interaction within the online environment. More recently, Dziuban et al. (2015) proposed in their study 3 main determinants: The learning engagement (how students were stimulated in their learning via the online environment), "Agency" (students' motivation, time management, and multiple task skills), Assessment (the way students observe and self-assess as well as are assessed in online learning). Also, Bickle et al. (2019) examine the satisfaction of students with online learning. They find that the sense of belonging with the students' online group and the online course quality impact students' level of satisfaction. From the findings of these studies, it is evident that each study identifies or examines different factors affecting student satisfaction in the online learning environment. Therefore, a study needs to be conducted, which concerns all of these factors in the same online environment to see which factors are more dominant.

### *Research Question*

In combination with the current context and the gap in the literature mentioned above, this research aims at identifying the determinants in student satisfaction with online learning in the higher education context in HCMC. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the research question was formulated as follows:

What are the determinants in student satisfaction with online learning in private universities in HCMC?

### *Hypotheses on the factors influencing student satisfaction with the online learning environment*

#### *Course effectiveness*

Course effectiveness refers to how students perceive teaching effectiveness, such as teaching methods, course management, and quality Navarro et al. (2005). They also indicate that course effectiveness has a considerable impact on student satisfaction. Additionally, Elliott (2002) concludes that the course effectiveness accounts for the most significant percentage of the satisfaction of their student journey in universities. Therefore, the following hypothesis is

constructed:

**H1:** There is a significant relationship between course effectiveness and student satisfaction.

*Provided Knowledge and Skills*

Knowledge and skills, in this case, propose the essential things that students attain when they choose a particular program for study. As a result, providing knowledge and skills refer to what a program/courses in a specific institution can equip their students to meet their needs and ensure their success in the future (Al-Sheeb et al., 2018). What is more, Nguyen (2016) finds out in her study that this factor strongly contributes to student satisfaction, especially in online courses. Hence, the second hypothesis is formulated:

**H2:** There is a significant relationship between provided knowledge and skills and student satisfaction.

*The sense of belonging*

The sense of belonging indicates students' perception of receiving help from the college community and connecting and being connected with others (Al-Sheeb et al., 2018; Singh & Thurman, 2019). Additionally, Freeman et al. (2007) and Fan et al. (2021) agree that the sense of belonging positively affects students' experience in their college. In other words, this factor manipulates student satisfaction in various ways. Consequently, the third hypothesis is built:

**H3:** There is a significant relationship between the sense of belonging and student satisfaction.

*The interaction with important people*

Important people refer to the members of faculty or higher education institutions. Endo and Harpel (1982) propose the possible impacts of the interaction with influential people on student satisfaction. Recently, Elliott (2002) and Billups (2008) have confirmed the positive effects of this factor on students' continuity of studying at a particular institution and their satisfaction. As a result, the fourth hypothesis is made:

**H4:** There is a significant relationship between the interaction with important people and student satisfaction.

*The utility of available facilities*

The utility of available facilities refers to the students' awareness and use of the school facilities such as online learning system, library, student service center, etc. Nasser et al. (2008) and Hanssen and Solvoll (2015) present that the more students utilize these facilities, the more satisfied they are in their college experience. Therefore, the last hypothesis is constructed:

**H5:** There is a significant relationship between the utility of available facilities and student satisfaction.

### *Conceptual framework*

Based on the previous studies on student satisfaction in general and in according to the student satisfaction with the online learning environment, the conceptual framework of the study was built as below:

Figure 1.

The factors affecting student satisfaction with online learning



As the figure presents, there are five factors that influence student satisfaction, including (1) course effectiveness, (2) provided knowledge and skills, (3) the sense of belonging, (4) the interaction with important people, and (5) the utility of the available facilities. The literature concluded these factors with the adaptation to the online learning context.

## **Methods**

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

This research was conducted at two private universities in Ho Chi Minh city Vietnam, Van Lang, and Hoa Sen University. These two universities offer various majors to students from engineering, technology, and social science. Moreover, within the current situation of Covid-19, Van Lang and Hoa Sen University have adopted online learning as an effective adaptation.

The convenience sampling method was employed in this study. According to Edgar et al. (2017), convenient sampling is the most popular kind of non-probabilistic sampling. This kind of sampling method makes use of contact with samples within the neighborhood or via the Internet. Regarding the benefits of this sampling method, Creswell (2014) and Edgar et al. (2017) indicate that convenience sampling is suitable for exploring attitudes and testing hypotheses.

### *Design of the Study*

The survey study was employed in this research. According to Check and Schutt (2011), a survey study is a scientific procedure in which data are collected via the participants' responses to a set of questions. They also emphasize that this type of research could apply to quantitative or qualitative research, depending on the research purposes and natures. Regarding the use of survey study, Straits (2005) states that exploring human attitudes, opinions, and behaviors towards a phenomenon is one of the most significant usages. This study aimed at investigating the most influenced factors on student satisfaction. Thus, the survey study was a suitable research design.

### *Research Instrument*

Due to the nature of the survey study and the purpose of this research, a questionnaire was used as the primary research instrument. Rowley (2014) explains that questionnaires are primarily used in conducting quantitative research, especially when the researcher wants to explore the behaviors, attitudes, frequency, or opinions on a particular scale. Moreover, Creswell (2014) concludes that using questionnaires could help the researcher collect massive data in a short time. What is more, Creswell (2014) proposes that questionnaires could be in various forms such as in paper, mail, or an online form with eligible costs for the study. The questionnaires were designed in Google forms and sent to participants via the Internet in this study.

In terms of designing the research instrument, the questionnaire was adopted and adapted from the study of Al-Sheeb et al. (2018). The adjustments were made to be suitable for the research. Particularly, the questionnaire consisted of 7 sections, mainly focusing on 6 constructs indicated in the conceptual framework. The first section was about demographic information, which was the gender of participants. Then the second section was about the students' overall satisfaction with 5 items. Following was the third section on course effectiveness, including 7 items. In the fourth section, there were 4 items concerning the construct of provided knowledge and skills. The sixth section was about the sense of belonging, which had 3 items.

Regarding the construct of the interaction with important people, 5 items were included. Last but not least, there were 6 items under the construct of the utility of available facilities. All the information was summarized in the following table:

Table 1.

Constructs included in the questionnaires

<b>No.</b>	<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Number of items</b>
1	Demographic features	1
2	Students' overall satisfaction	5
3	Course effectiveness	7
4	Provided knowledge and skills	4
5	The sense of belonging	3
6	The interaction with important people	5
7	The utility of available facilities	6

The responses for section 1 were collected via multiple-choice answers. The responses were recorded from sections 2 to 5 via a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "1" strongly disagree to "5" strongly agree. For the last two sections, the participants answered the questions by giving the number identical with frequency, from (1) never to (5) daily.

### *Data collection & analysis*

The online questionnaires were delivered to the target participants via some common online platforms such as Facebook, MS Teams, and the LMS from the schools after they had finished their semester. Efthymiou and Antoniou (2012) state that online platforms are suitable for distributing questionnaires and collecting data. After distributing the online questionnaires, 317 responses were collected and coded for the analysis process.

The data were analyzed by using the PLS-SEM approach, which was conducted via the SmartPLS software. Hair et al. (2013) and Sarstedt et al. (2017) indicate that PLS-SEM is an appropriate way of exploring the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables. Also, it provides great tools for evaluating both measurement and structural models with high accuracy. Following this approach, three main stages were involved in analyzing the data: coding the data, assessing the measurement model (outer model), and assessing the structural model (inner model).

Firstly, all the constructs and indicators of each were coded to import to the software. All of the codes are presented in the following table:

Table 2.

Codes used in the data analysis procedures

No.	Constructs	Code of items/indicator
1	Demographic features	GEN
2	Students' overall satisfaction	SAT_1, SAT_2, SAT_3, SAT_4, SAT_5
3	Course effectiveness	CE_1, CE_2, CE_3, CE_4, CE_5, CE_6, CE_7
4	Provided knowledge and skills	SKN_1, SKN_2, SKN_3, SKN_4
5	The sense of belonging	BEL_1, BEL_2, BEL_3
6	The interaction with important people	INT_1, INT_2, INT_3, INT_4, INT_5
7	The utility of available facilities	FAC_1, FAC_2, FAC_3, FAC_4, FAC_5, FAC_6

Secondly, the measurement model (outer model) was tested to confirm the constructs' reliability and validity. As listed in the instrument section, there were 5 main constructs examined in the study, including (1) overall student satisfaction, (2) course effectiveness, (3) provided knowledge and skills, (4) the sense of belonging, and (5) the interaction with important people, and (6) the utility of available facilities.

Notably, the statistical indexes used to validate the measurement model were Outer Factor Loading (to determine and keep/terminate the contribution of each indicator to the constructs), Construct Reliability (CR) (to test the reliability of the indicators of each construct), Convergent

Validity (AVE), and Discriminant Validity (to test the validity of the indicators of each construct). The reason for using these indexes is because the constructs were measured via a reflective model.

Then, the structural model (inner model) was assessed to examine the relationship between the exogenous and endogenous variables. At this step, all the hypothesized relationships (H1 to H5) were evaluated to determine the path loading. Last but not least, bootstrapping was employed with the scale of 5000 re-sampling in order to assess the t-test value. This index would point out whether the hypothesized relationships were of significance or not.

#### *Validity & Reliability*

To assure the validity and reliability of the study, some techniques were employed in the study. Thing first technique was piloting the research instrument. As stated in the "research instrument" section, the questionnaire was adapted and adjusted from the study of Al-Sheeb et al. (2018). Then, to identify the measurement power of all the items, the questionnaire was piloted for 50 participants. The following table indicated the reliability of the questionnaires in the pilot process:

Table 4.

The composite reliability (CR) of the questionnaire items.

	<b>Composite Reliability</b>
<b>BEL</b>	0.85
<b>CE</b>	0.904
<b>FAC</b>	0.934
<b>INT</b>	0.890
<b>SAT</b>	0.878
<b>SKN</b>	0.93

According to Hair et al. (2013), the reliability of the questionnaire could be assessed via composite reliability. Also, they recommend a standard value of above 0.708. from table 4, it is apparent that all the items of the questionnaire were reliable.

After the piloting process, minor adjustments were made to create the final version of the questionnaires. Other techniques related to the statistical index in the software will be explained in the finding section.

## Results/Findings

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Table 3.

Demographic features of the participants

	Number	Percent (%)
<b>Male</b>	101	31.9
<b>Female</b>	216	68.1

In the study, there were 317 participants. Among these, females made up the larger percentages than males. However, the gender variable was not the focus of this research.

### *The Assessment of the Measurement Model*

As told in the previous section, the constructs of SAT, CE, SKN, and FAC were built based on the reflective model. Therefore, the first step was to examine the outer factor loading.

The factor loading of each indicator should be above 0.7. As a result, the four indicators, "SKN\_3", "INT\_4", "FAC\_1, and "INT\_2" were removed in the next step of data analysis. Then, the second step was to examine the construct validity. According to Hair et al. (2013), the construct validity can be tested via composite reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The following tables summarized the result of these:

Table 5.

The composite reliability (CR) and convergent validity (AVE) of the measurement model

	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
<b>BEL</b>	0.845	0.645
<b>CE</b>	0.924	0.635
<b>FAC</b>	0.921	0.7
<b>INT</b>	0.897	0.744
<b>SAT</b>	0.893	0.625
<b>SKN</b>	0.903	0.757

As Hair et al. (2013) suggest, the CR must be above 0.708, and the AVE should be 0.5 or higher. In Table 3, the result of CR and AVE of the measurement model met these requirements. In terms of discriminant validity, it is said that the square root of a particular construct in the cross-loadings should be higher than any correlation of it with any other construct (Hair et al., 2013). As shown in table 4, all the indexes satisfied this standard.

Table 6.

The cross-loadings of the measurement model

	<b>BEL</b>	<b>CE</b>	<b>FAC</b>	<b>INT</b>	<b>SAT</b>	<b>SKN</b>
<b>BEL_1</b>	<i>0.799</i>	0.483	0.333	0.288	0.629	0.595
<b>BEL_2</b>	<i>0.77</i>	0.28	0.216	0.248	0.404	0.311
<b>BEL_3</b>	<i>0.838</i>	0.388	0.166	0.248	0.509	0.365
<b>CE_1</b>	0.388	<i>0.816</i>	0.318	0.242	0.556	0.605
<b>CE_2</b>	0.358	<i>0.807</i>	0.28	0.207	0.555	0.525
<b>CE_3</b>	0.419	<i>0.71</i>	0.179	0.164	0.462	0.431
<b>CE_4</b>	0.329	<i>0.86</i>	0.258	0.186	0.543	0.564
<b>CE_5</b>	0.537	<i>0.772</i>	0.265	0.222	0.601	0.552
<b>CE_6</b>	0.327	<i>0.798</i>	0.37	0.307	0.522	0.695
<b>CE_7</b>	0.392	<i>0.803</i>	0.442	0.338	0.551	0.701
<b>FAC_2</b>	0.26	0.31	<i>0.788</i>	0.464	0.273	0.397
<b>FAC_3</b>	0.206	0.35	<i>0.826</i>	0.407	0.315	0.445
<b>FAC_4</b>	0.276	0.346	<i>0.858</i>	0.522	0.321	0.395
<b>FAC_5</b>	0.255	0.255	<i>0.833</i>	0.468	0.278	0.354
<b>FAC_6</b>	0.29	0.325	<i>0.875</i>	0.503	0.321	0.419
<b>INT_1</b>	0.336	0.259	0.414	<i>0.886</i>	0.318	0.4
<b>INT_3</b>	0.264	0.309	0.55	<i>0.863</i>	0.234	0.43
<b>INT_5</b>	0.229	0.203	0.535	<i>0.839</i>	0.207	0.362
<b>SAT_1</b>	0.45	0.68	0.271	0.246	<i>0.739</i>	0.526
<b>SAT_2</b>	0.542	0.529	0.29	0.201	<i>0.842</i>	0.479
<b>SAT_3</b>	0.533	0.593	0.343	0.34	<i>0.797</i>	0.615
<b>SAT_4</b>	0.534	0.457	0.27	0.221	<i>0.796</i>	0.471
<b>SAT_5</b>	0.55	0.406	0.245	0.171	<i>0.775</i>	0.417
<b>SKN_1</b>	0.411	0.688	0.457	0.397	0.515	<i>0.892</i>
<b>SKN_2</b>	0.409	0.7	0.425	0.382	0.525	<i>0.89</i>
<b>SKN_4</b>	0.596	0.536	0.378	0.416	0.615	<i>0.825</i>

Finally, to prove that indicators of a particular construct were separate from each other, the HTMT matrix was employed, as presented in table 5. It was apparent that all the indexes in the HTMT matrix of the measurement model were smaller than 0.85. Therefore, the discriminant validity was achieved (Henseler et al., 2015).



Table 7.

The HTMT matrix of the measurement model

	<b>BEL</b>	<b>CE</b>	<b>FAC_</b>	<b>INT</b>	<b>SAT</b>
<b>CE</b>	0.583				
<b>FAC</b>	0.366	0.42			
<b>INT</b>	0.402	0.342	0.67		
<b>SAT</b>	0.809	0.767	0.411	0.343	
<b>SKN</b>	0.657	0.844	0.557	0.547	0.743

Hence, based on the validity and reliability test, the measurement model of this research was valid.

### *The Assessment of the Structural Model*

In order to test the structural model, Sharma and Aggarwal (2019) propose that the most important thing to consider is to evaluate the predictive ability of the model. Hair et al. (2013) present the process of evaluating the structural model: (1) Collinearity, (2)  $R^2$  explanation of endogenous latent variables, (3) Predictive relevance  $Q^2$ , and (4)  $f^2$  and  $q^2$  effects size of path coefficients. This was the procedure employed to analyze the data.

Firstly, the indexes of Inner VIF value were examined to ensure there was no risk of available collinearity of all the constructs. In the current model, the VIF was smaller than 3; therefore, no collinearity was available. Secondly, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was considered. After running the PLS-SEM software, the  $R^2$  of this model was 0.613. According to Hair et al. (2013), the current model had moderate power of predictivity, which was acceptable. Next, the  $Q^2$  was assessed via the blindfolding procedure. Based on the required procedure, the  $Q^2$  of the model was 0.369. The result confirmed the  $R^2$  result; in other words, the predictive power of this model was accepted as moderate. In addition, the  $f^2$  (effect size) was assessed to see whether the effect of predictive construct on the endogenous latent construct. In this case, the  $f^2$  was presented in table 6. It was readable that only three factors BEL, CE, and SKN, significantly affected the construct SAT ( $f^2 > 0,15$ ).

Table 8.

The effective size results

	<b>SAT</b>
<b>BEL</b>	0.26
<b>CE</b>	0.17
<b>FAC</b>	0.004
<b>INT</b>	0.001
<b>SKN</b>	0.021

### *The Hypothesis Test Results*

After validating the measurement and structural model, the hypothesis test results were conducted via the Bootstrapping technique with 5000 re-sampling and significance of 0.05. To sum up, there were 5 statistical hypotheses that identified the relationship between 5 factors to the constructs of Student satisfaction in the research. Notably, they were:

**H1:** There is a significant relationship between course effectiveness and student satisfaction.

**H2:** There is a significant relationship between provided knowledge and skills and student satisfaction.

**H3:** There is a significant relationship between the sense of belonging and student satisfaction.

**H4:** There is a significant relationship between the interaction with important people and student satisfaction.

**H5:** There is a significant relationship between the utility of available facilities and student satisfaction.

The results of the hypothesis tests are summarized in table 8.

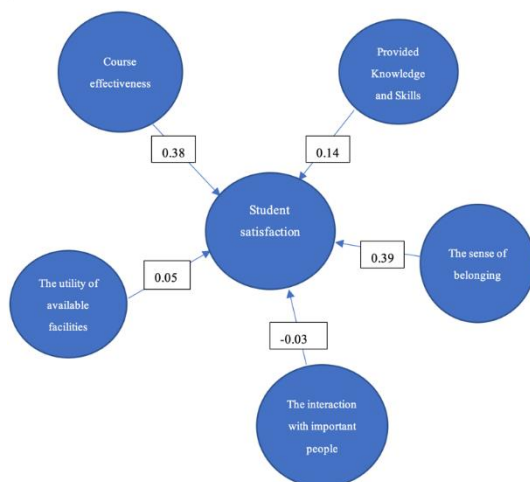
Table 9.

Hypotheses testing results

Hypothesis	Path loadings	T-values	P-values	Status
H1	0.38	5.985	0.000	Supported
H2	0.14	2.000	0.046	Supported
H3	0.39	8.985	0.000	Supported
H4	-0.03	0.691	0.490	Not supported
H5	0.05	1.100	0.271	Not supported

Figure 2.

The model with path loadings



Providing that a hypothesis was supported, the t-value should be higher than the threshold of 1.96, and the p-value was less than 0.05 (Hair et al., 2019; Kock, 2016). Thus, the determinants that influenced student satisfaction in the study context, i.e., course effectiveness, provided knowledge and skills, and the sense of belonging.

## Discussion

This study aimed at identifying the determinants of student satisfaction with online learning at private universities in Ho Chi Minh city. Through the literature, five hypothesized relationships were established between 5 different factors: course effectiveness, providing knowledge and skills, the sense of belonging, the interaction with important people and the utility of available facilities, and student satisfaction. Based on the hypotheses testing results shown in table 7, it was concluded that there were three determinants to student satisfaction in the online learning environment. Firstly, course effectiveness has a substantial impact on student satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the studies of Elliott (2002), Navarro et al. (2005), Elliott (2002), Al-Sheeb et al. (2018); Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2013). In both offline and online learning environments, the course effectiveness, which could be manifested as teaching quality and management, course outcomes, etc., is likely to be considered when students think about their school. The second determinant is provided knowledge and skills. In any learning environment, especially online, students are constantly seeking something useful for their educational experience and future. This assumption is similar to the findings of Nguyen (2016) and Al-Sheeb et al. (2018). Lastly, another factor that shows a strong relationship with student satisfaction is the sense of belonging. Many researchers have concluded that when students study at a particular institution, the connection with other people in the community, the feeling of being connected, respected, and cared for positively affect student satisfaction (Al-Sheeb et al., 2018; Fan et al., 2021; Freeman et al., 2007; Singh & Thurman, 2019).

Besides these similarities, this research has indicated some significant points. The first thing to mention is that this research was conducted in the context of COVID-19, which would strongly affect student perceptions and satisfaction towards their university (Le & Truong, 2021; Maheshwari, 2021). Additionally, as mentioned in the introduction and literature review sections, despite many studies in the tract of student satisfaction in the online learning environment, they mainly focus on online courses separate from other elements of the school ecosystem. Hence, this study proposes that the determinants were different when considering the student satisfaction with online learning in a whole school ecosystem. Finally, due to the predictive power of the study, it is suggested that the stakeholder should pay more attention to improving course effectiveness, providing knowledge and skills, and the sense of belonging to enhance student satisfaction with online learning.

## Conclusion

The study addressed the determinants in student satisfaction with online learning at private universities in Vietnam. 317 participants were involved via the convenience sampling method. Based on the previous studies, five statistical hypotheses were proposed and tested via online questionnaires. In particular, the online questionnaires were responded to identify which of the factors, including course effectiveness, provided knowledge and skills, the sense of belonging, the interaction with important people, and the utility of available facilities, had the more robust relationship with the student satisfaction. From the data analysis by using the PSL-SEM approach, among five factors, there were three determinants: course effectiveness, providing knowledge and skills, and the sense of belonging, which meet the requirements to strengthen student satisfaction. Other factors had no significant relationship with student satisfaction in the research context. As a result, the study suggested that to increase student satisfaction. The stakeholders should focus on improving the course quality, equipping students with essential knowledge and skills, and promoting the sense of being a part of the university community.

Besides these findings, the study remained some limitations. First of all, due to the limit in reaching the participants in other private universities and the time constraints, the number of participants in the study did not as many as expected. Therefore, the result of the study might not be applicable in other contexts. Moreover, the study aimed at identifying the determinants of student satisfaction with online learning based on the factors found in the previous study. Hence, it is potential that there are other available determinants. Finally, the research results point the determinants out of examined factors; however, the question of whether the effects of which determinant would be larger still remained unanswered.

From all the limitations, it is recommended that other researchers working on the same topic would employ a larger size of participants from different universities to make the result more generalizable. Finally, more exploration studies could be conducted to identify more determinants of student satisfaction with online learning as a part of the school ecosystem.

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## Strategies for Translating English Passive Sentences into Vietnamese

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines some most common strategies for the Vietnamese translation of English passive voice such as “The use of markers ‘được’/‘bị’”, “Change to active”, “Paraphrasing” in order to find out the frequency and the rules for the use of those strategies by collecting and analyzing the data from the English and Vietnamese versions of a novel named “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone” and a book named “A Brief History of Time”.

And the findings of this study disapproves the view that Vietnamese active sentences are the dominant choice for translating English passive voice since its results indicate that English It-clefts or English agentless passive sentences where the agent of the action is unclear or concerned with generalization rather than specific individuals have a high tendency of being translated into active structures in Vietnamese while using a marker like 'được' or 'bị' and subject-less active sentences are the primary ways for translating other kinds of English agentless passive sentences into Vietnamese.

Besides, the results of the research also indicate that the use of markers 'được'/'bị' is frequently applied to translate agent-included passives, but the position of the agent in Vietnamese sentences varies according to its features.

**Keywords:** English passive sentences, Translation strategies, ‘được’/‘bị’, Vietnamese translation, Vietnamese active structures

### Introduction

Passive voice is used frequently in many varieties of written English, but the structural differences between English passive sentences and the corresponding structures in Vietnamese are assumed to pose various problems for English - Vietnamese learners since they belong to "a hierarchy of difficulty by which a teacher or linguist can make a prediction of the relative difficulty of a given aspect of the second language" (Stockwell et al., 1965, as cited in Mohammad, 2012, p.16). Furthermore, English passive structures can be translated into active structures or "a neutral structure" (Bui, 2005; Luu, 2010; Le, Nguyen, & Vu, 2016). Therefore, this paper examines some most common strategies for translating English passive voice into



Vietnamese and the rules for the use of these strategies and introduces general procedures for the Vietnamese translation of English passives (here called "Vietnamese translation") by gathering and analyzing the full form of English passive sentences collected from English and Vietnamese versions of a novel called "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" (abbreviated to "Harry Potter") and a book named "A Brief History of Time".

## Literature review

Vietnamese scholars have mainly discussed models or strategies for translating passive sentences from English into Vietnamese. Generally, four translation strategies were claimed by some scholars, which are: (1) *Using a passive marker (abbreviated<sup>1</sup> to "marker") like "bị/được" to translate English passive sentences into "passive forms" in Vietnamese*; (2) *Changing English passive sentences into active structures in Vietnamese, including "impersonal active structures"*; (3) *Translating English passive sentences into a neutral structure/middle structure that lines between active and passive structures*. (Bui, 2005; Nguyen, 2005; Hoang, 2015; Luu, 2010; Le, Nguyen, & Vu, 2016); and (4) *Using a two-layer "theme-rheme structure" ("the active structure inside the passive structure") for the translation (Tran, 2004, as cited in Luu, 2010)*. And the rules for the use of each strategy were claimed as follows:

- 1) **Using passive markers:** should be applied when: (i) *there was no agent in the source text (abbreviated to "ST")* (Bui, 2005; Le et al., 2016); or; (ii) *"the passive structure in the source text is a ring of the theme-rheme chain"* (Luu, 2010, p. 101):

(1) [ENG<sup>2</sup>] Aspirin [...] are the drugs of choice. *These drugs* should be **given** [...].

[VIET<sup>3</sup>] Aspirin [...] là các thuốc được chọn dùng. *Các thuốc này nên* **được dùng** [...].

(2) [ENG] *Several methods of ignition were used* [...].

[VIET] *Một số phương pháp đánh lửa đã* **được sử dụng** [...].

- 2) **Changing to Vietnamese active forms:** Some scholars claimed that this strategy should be used to "ensure logic" and to be more suitable for the style of Vietnamese due to the tendency of using the active sentences and that it should be applied when: (i) *the agent occurs in English passives (Bui, 2005), the agent of the sentence is the doer of the verb (Luu, 2010)*; or; (ii) *when it can be referred from the preceding sentence*; or; (iii) *when English sentences can be translated into Vietnamese active sentences that do not have a subject within (Bui, 2005)*:

<sup>1</sup> The List of Abbreviations is in Appendix 01

<sup>2</sup> [ENG] means English

<sup>3</sup> [VIET] means Vietnamese

(3) [ENG] He can't be *found* anywhere.

[VIET] Họ không *tìm thấy* **đứa bé** ở đâu.

(4) [ENG] **Computers** are *thought* to have [...].

[VIET] *Người ta* **cho rằng** **máy tính** có [...].

3) *Using a neutral structure*: “neutral” forms or subjectless active forms can be used for the Vietnamese translation when: (i) *the translators want to avoid expressing negative meaning by using the marker “bị” or positive meaning by using the marker “được”*; or; (ii) *when those meanings are not transparently expressed in ST (Bui, 2005; Le et al., 2016)*; or; (iii) *when main verbs in English passives express “propositional attitude” (thái độ mệnh đề), such as “assume”, “believe”, “estimate”, “report” etc., (Bui, 2005)*:

(5) [ENG] **The window** was *shut* [...].

[VIET] **Cửa sổ** đã *đóng* hết [...].

4) *Using a two-layer “theme-rheme structure”*: applied for passive sentences whose agent is the doer of the verb (Luu, 2010):

(6) [ENG] He was *scolded* by the teacher.

[VIET] Anh ta **bị** *thầy mắng*

The findings of previous studies are indeed helpful and precious. Nevertheless, there are underlying rules that restrict the use of techniques for the Vietnamese translation, for example, in the below instances, in which there is no agent or there exists a ring of a theme-rheme chain in ST but the target texts (abbreviated to “TT”), are still translated into active forms as in (7) & (8), or when the agent is the doer, but the translation is not an active form or a “two-layer theme-rheme structure” in Vietnamese as in (9):

(7) [ENG] ‘*Potter’s been sent* a broomstick, Professor.’.

[VIET] “Thưa giáo sư, **có người gửi cho** Harry cây chổi ạ!”

(8) [ENG] I was a research student [...]. Two years before, I had been diagnosed, [...] and **given to understand** [...]

[VIET] [...] thì tôi còn là một nghiên cứu sinh [...]. Hai năm trước đó, tôi được chuẩn đoán là, [...] và **người ta đã cho** tôi hiểu rằng [...].

(9) [ENG] A better model [...] was **put** forward by Linde [...].

[VIET] Một mô hình hay hơn [...] đã **được phát triển** cũng bởi Linde [...].

Some verbs like “assume”, “believe”, “claim”, “think” etc., can be translated in passive forms with a marker “*bị*” or “*được*” like (10) & (11); hence these verbs are not the only rule for the use of “impersonal active structure”:

(10) [ENG] [...] most **have been** uncritically *assumed* by one or another author, [...].

[VIET] [...] hầu hết có thể **được** một hoặc nhiều tác giả *biện luận* và *giả thiết*, [...].

(11) [ENG] [...], acids would **have been** *thought of* [...].

[VIET] [...], axit **được** *coi là* [...].

Furthermore, the marker-using strategy is far complicated in the light of the presence or absence of agents in ST, and the rules for translating English passives into a “two-layer theme-rheme structure” or other structures in Vietnamese should be analyzed in further detail. On that account, this research aims to seek for some dominant translation strategies in the bilingual corpus built from the two aforementioned books, analyzing those strategies, and to establish general translation procedures for rendering English passives into Vietnamese, based on translation procedures introduced by Newmark (1988) and translation strategies introduced by Baker (2018). The translating procedure by Newmark is operational and begins with choosing a method of approach (Newmark, 1988), while Baker (2018) used the term “strategies” when addressing non-equivalent in translation. This paper uses the term “translation strategies” to indicate ways of translating English passives into Vietnamese that the researcher has found in his corpus.

### Research Questions

By analyzing the data from the corpus, the author of this paper seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. What are common strategies for translating English passives into Vietnamese, and the rules for the use of these strategies?
2. What are the general procedures which could be used to translate English passives into Vietnamese?

### Methods

Quantitative method, contrastive linguistics, and corpus linguistics are some main research methods in the paper. And a small corpus was built from the two selected novels to serve the research’s purposes. Nevertheless, instances retrieved as samples of the research are the full form of English passive voice, excluding passives that are postmodifiers of a noun (short forms without auxiliary “to be”) and passives with “get” for the reason that “*the get passive is extremely rare*” (Bilber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999, p. 476). Furthermore, this paper mainly focuses on the structures and components of passive sentences in English and

Vietnamese, and semantics and pragmatics will be discussed when necessary.

In addition, the corpus does not include sentences that have English verbs in “V-ed” form used as an adjective in the sentence as in 01):

01) [...], but he didn't want to get **involved**.

Words in the V-ed form are judged to be an adjective on the following criteria:

- i. *Their part of speech in Oxford Dictionary of English (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) (Stevenson, 2010).*
- ii. *Suppose the first criterion fails to determine the V-ed form. In that case, the second one will be applied: If preceding an adverb of degree like "totally" before the V-ed and changing "to be" to another copula are feasible, the V-ed, then, is judged as an adjective.*

Besides, there has been much debate on the question of whether there is a passive structure in Vietnamese. According to Nguyen (2009), some researchers and linguists denied the existence of the passive sentences in Vietnamese, such as Tran (1936), Thompson (1965), Nguyen (2000), Cao (2001), Nguyen (1977), Nguyen (1986, 1998), while others like Diep & Nguyen (2000), Le (1989), Nguyen (1976), Hoang (1980), recognized the existence of this kind of structure in Vietnamese. This research only discusses the strategies for translating English passives into Vietnamese and will not address the question about the existence of Vietnamese passives. Nevertheless, the term “passive sentence/structure” is used in this paper due to the ease of presenting the ideas.

And the corpus was built with the following procedures:

#### *Procedures for building the bilingual corpus*

- 1) Search instances that comprise a full form of English passives;
- 2) Collect all the corresponding Vietnamese translations of those English instances found in the first step;
- 3) Use Microsoft Excel to align the samples collected in steps 1) and 2);
- 4) Remove any sample that does not meet the full form of English passive voice criteria and build a bilingual corpus for the research.

#### *Data categories & analysis*

- 1) Use Microsoft Excel to categorize and conduct the statistics of the data;
- 2) Analyze the data to find the answers to the research questions.

## Results/Findings and discussion

Based on the corpus with 672 passive instances that meet the criteria of the collected samples, translation strategies have been categorized, and their frequency is indicated in Table 1, which shows that using a marker “*bi*” or “*được*” is predominant in Vietnamese translations with 406 out of 672 instances, accounting for 60%. And the second most popular strategy is changing English passives into active forms in TT with 15%, followed by “Paraphrase” with 12%. The two least common strategies are “Omit markers” and “Omit passive structures” with 10% and 3%, respectively:

**Table 1.** *The frequency of each Translation strategy*

No.	Strategies	Number of instances	Percentage <sup>4</sup>
1	Use a marker	406	60%
2	Change to active forms	99	15%
3	Paraphrase	80	12%
4	Omit markers	66	10%
5	Omit passive structures	21	3%
<i>Total</i>		<i>672</i>	<i>100%</i>

### *The use of markers and the use of active forms for the Vietnamese translation.*

Sun & Zhou (2010) claimed that forms were a tool to serve content and different forms expressed different meanings and that in many cases, using the same form with ST for translations could more fully and appropriately express the meaning in ST rather than using another form that is common in TT. Consequently, using another form might be at the risk of distorting the meaning in ST. This may account for the result that marker strategy is the most dominant one for translating English passives in the researcher’s data. And the data also indicates that this strategy is still a primary one for translating agent-included passives in English, as presented in table 2, which disapproves the idea that such English sentences should be translated into active forms in Vietnamese.

**Table 2.** *The occurrence of each strategy in agent-included sentences*

No.	Strategies	Number of instances	Percentage
1	Use a marker	129	79%
2	Paraphrase	16	10%
3	Change to actives	15	9%
4	Omit markers	4	2%
<i>Total</i>		<i>164</i>	<i>100%</i>

And most of those 15 English instances of change-to-active strategy (abbreviated to “active strategy”) in table 2 do not have a tight connection with their preceding sentences, which is reflected in the position of the sentences in a paragraph or in the loose connection between the patients of passive sentences, “*the entity being acted on*” (Bilber et al., 1999, p. 477), with participants in the preceding sentence. While those in sentences of marker-using strategy

<sup>4</sup> The percentage in the tables in this paper is rounded up

(abbreviated to “marker strategy”) have a tight connection with their preceding ones, which is reflected in the features of the patients, most of them are or are modified by “anaphoric reference items” which include “*pronouns, demonstratives, the article ‘the’ and items like ‘such a’*” (McCarthy, 1996, p.35) that make patients known information. Therefore, the marker strategy should be used in the light of making the text cohesive as the anaphoric reference item will be in the position near the one it presents, and due to “information principle” in which “*the clause characteristically opens with given or background information and ends with new information*” (Bilber et al., 1999, p. 896):

- (1) [ENG] *The fact that light travels at a finite, but very high, speed was first **discovered** in 1676 by the Danish astronomer [...].*
- [VIET] Năm 1676, **nhà thiên văn học Đan Mạch** [...] là người đầu tiên **phát hiện ra** rằng ánh sáng truyền với vận tốc hữu hạn, mặc dù rất lớn.
- (2) [ENG] *There was a different interpretation..., which was **advocated** by **Roger** [...]*
- [VIET] *Có một cách giải thích khác..., mà **Roger** [...] **rất ủng hộ**.*
- (3) [ENG] *The proposal [...] was called the steady-state theory. **It** was **suggested** in 1948 by two refugees [...].*
- [VIET] **Nó được đưa ra** vào năm 1948, bởi hai người tị nạn [...].
- (4) [ENG] *[...] that circular motion was the most perfect. **This idea** was **elaborated** by Ptolemy into a complete cosmological model.*
- [VIET] [...] rằng chuyển động tròn là chuyển động hoàn thiên nhất. **Ý tưởng này đã được Ptolemy phát triển** thành một mô hình vũ trụ hoàn chỉnh.

Instance (1) & (2) both occur in the first sentence of a paragraph, and therefore, they have a loose connection with the last sentence in the previous paragraph, particularly the loose connection between participants in the passives with those in the previous sentence, allowing the agent who is new information to occupy the subject position in the Vietnamese text. Consequently, the active strategy is preferred for the translation of such sentences. While in (3) & (4), the passive structures have a tight connection with their preceding sentences: the patient "it" in (3) and "this idea" in (4) can be recognized by referring back to the phrase adjoining them. Therefore the marker strategy makes the text more cohesive and more suitable to the order in which known information precedes unknown information than the active strategy does.

Furthermore, the choice between markers “*được*” and “*bị*” and the position of agents in the marker strategy vary according to the occurrence of the agent in English passives and other factors. For this reason, this research examines this strategy according to two kinds of English passives: “agent-included passives” and “agentless passives”.

## The marker strategy for agent-included and agentless passives in English

### Agent-included passives

If English passives include an agent, the agent will always be reserved in TT, but its position in TT varies according to its characters and its structural complexity in comparison to the main verb. Table 3 shows two positions of an agent in Vietnamese translations: (i) *before the main verb* (abbreviated to “before V”), and (ii) *after the main verb* (abbreviated to “after V”).

**Table 3.** Positions of agents in Vietnamese translations

No	Position of agents	Number of instances	Percentage
1	“Before V”: <i>Marker + Agent + Verb</i>	40	32%
2	“After V”: <i>Marker + Verb + “Bởi/Bằng/Do...” (By) + Agent</i>	86	68%
<i>Total</i>		126 <sup>5</sup>	100%

Table 3 indicates that the primary position of agents is “after V” (68%). Nevertheless, table 4 and table 5 show that the “after V” position will be preferred when the agent is inanimate as in (6), while “before V” is preferred when the agent is animate as in (5):

(5) [ENG] *This idea was **elaborated** by Ptolemy [...]*

[VIET] *Ý tưởng này đã **được** Ptolemy **phát triển** thành [...]*

(6) [ENG] *[...] which was not **affected** by what happened in it.*

[VIET] *[...] và không **chịu ảnh hưởng** bởi những điều xảy ra trong nó.*

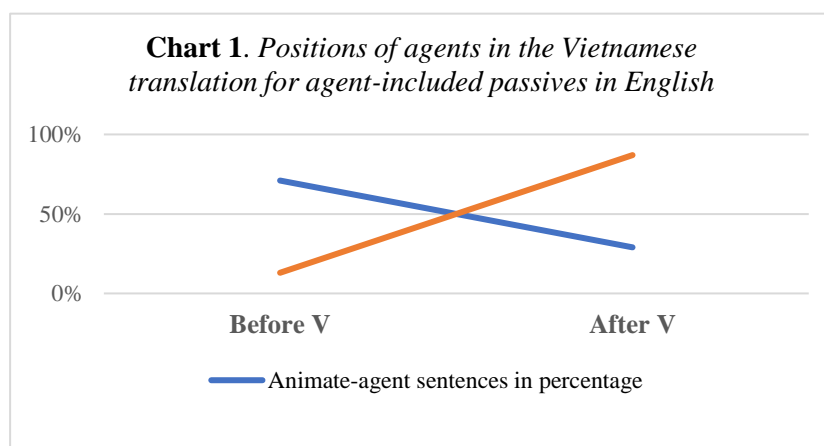
**Table 4.** Positions of agents in Vietnamese translations for *animate-agent passives*

No	Position of agents	Number of instances	Percentage
1	Before V	29	71%
2	After V	12	29%
<i>Total</i>		41	100%

**Table 5.** Positions of agents in Vietnamese translations for *inanimate-agent passives*

No	Position of agents	Number of instances	Percentage
1	After V	74	87%
2	Before V	11	13%
<i>Total</i>		85	100%

<sup>5</sup> There are 129 agent-included passives in English, but there are 3 sentences whose agents lose the feature of a typical agent in Vietnamese translation. Hence these instances are excluded in the statistic table.



Since the animate agent in English passives is the “doer” or “implementer” who conducts or finishes the action, it has a high tendency to be placed before the verb to form an active sentence in Vietnamese on the grounds that active forms are a highly common form in Vietnamese as claimed by Bui (2005), Nguyen (2005). Therefore, markers like “*bị*” or “*được*” are used to reserve the style and character of ST in TT and placing animate agents “before V” in Vietnamese is applied to give the Vietnamese translation all the ease of TT and not to make the Vietnamese sentences sound like a translation. And this strategy is supported by 71% of instances, as shown in Table 4. Nevertheless, there are 12 instances in the corpus where agents follow main verbs. Those agents, however, are particularly complex structures modified by other components and more cumbersome than the main verb. Consequently, those agents have a high tendency for being placed after the main verb due to “the principle of end-weight”, which explains “*the tendency for long and complex elements to be placed towards the end of a clause*” (Bilber et al., 1999, p. 898):

- (7) [ENG] [...] until *similar models **were discovered*** in 1935 by *the American physicist Howard Robertson and the British mathematician Arthur Walker* [...].

[...] cho tới khi *những mô hình tương tự **được phát minh** bởi nhà vật lý Mỹ Howard Robertson và nhà toán học Anh Arthur Walker* [...].

- (8) [ENG] It was *suggested* in 1948 by *two refugees from Nazi-occupied Austria, Hermann Bondi and Thomas Gold* [...].

[VIET] Nó **được đưa ra** vào năm 1948, bởi *hai người tị nạn chạy khỏi nước Áo đang bị bọn phát xít chiếm đóng, đó là Hermann Bondi và Thamas Gold* [...].

In above instances , the agents can be put before the verbs, but the sentences will lose their naturalness as in (8b):

? (8b) Nó **được** hai người tị nạn chạy khỏi nước Áo đang bị bọn phát xít chiếm đóng, đó là Hermann Bondi và Thamas Gold **đưa ra**.



And table 5 illustrates that among 85 instances that include an inanimate agent, there are 74 instances in which the agents are placed after the main verb as in (11) and only 11 instances where the agents are placed before the main verb as in (9) & (10). But in comparison to the main verb, most of these agents in those 74 instances have a rather complicated structure, as in (11), while those in 11 instances of “before V” have quite simple a structure, as in (9) & (10). Therefore, the position of agents is expected to be highly influenced by their length versus the length of the verb and their features (animate vs. inanimate).

Additionally, if inanimate agents are instruments or methods rather than “doers” or initiators of the action, their position is “after V” as in (11):

(9) [ENG] **A cannonball fired upward from the earth** will be *slowed down* by gravity and [...].

[VIET] **Một viên đạn đại bác khi bắn lên từ mặt đất sẽ bị lực hấp dẫn làm cho chuyển động chậm lại** và [...].

(10) [ENG] **any normal object** is forever *confined* by relativity to move [...].

[VIET] **một vật bình thường** vĩnh viễn bị *tính tương đối giới hạn* chuyển động [...].

(11) [ENG] [...] **the position of a point** can be *specified* by two coordinates, latitude and longitude.

[VIET] [...] **vị trí của một điểm trên đó** có thể được ghi bằng hai tọa độ, kinh độ và vĩ độ.

(12) [ENG] [...] **light** should be *bent* by gravitational fields.

(12a) [VIET] [...] **ánh sáng** có thể bị *bẻ cong* bởi các trường hấp dẫn.

(12b) [VIET] [...] **ánh sáng** có thể bị các trường hấp dẫn *bẻ cong*.

In (11), the agents “two coordinates, latitude and longitude” in English sentences are translated into “hai tọa độ, kinh độ và vĩ độ”, which are instruments to conduct the action (“specify”) rather than the “doer” or “implementer” and which are longer and more complex than the main verb “specify” in term of structure. Consequently, the preferred position is “after V”. In contrast, the agent in (12) is in a rather simple form and is the “doer”/“implementer” of the action (“bend”); hence it can precede the main verb as in (12a) or follow the main verb as in (12b).

Besides, if the marker is “do” instead of “bị” or “được”, the agent will be placed right after the marker “do” and before V, regardless of the complexity of its structure, as in (13) & (14):

- (13) [ENG] **Hanoi's delegation at the EC – Vietnam conference will be led by its top investment manager Dau Ngoc Xuan, [...].**

[VIET] **Phái đoàn của Hà Nội tại Hội nghị EC – Việt Nam sẽ do một viên chức hàng đầu về đầu tư, ông Đậu Ngọc Xuân, [...] dẫn đầu.**

- (14) [ENG] [...] but **the money was provided** for Plato by Dion of Syracuse [...].

[VIET] [...] nhưng **tiền là do** Dion xứ Syracuse **chu cấp** cho Plato, [...].

### Agentless passives

Table 6 shows that 508 English passive instances do not include an agent, and the marker strategy is still the most frequent with 277 instances (55%), followed by active strategy and "Paraphrase" with 17% 13%, respectively. The omissions of markers and of passives in Vietnamese translations are least common.

**Table 6.** The frequency of Vietnamese translation strategies for agentless passives in English

No	Strategies	Number of instances	Percentage
1	Use a marker	277	55%
2	Change to actives	84	17%
3	Paraphrase	64	13%
4	Omit the marker	62	12%
5	Omit passive structures	21	4%
<i>Total</i>		<i>508</i>	<i>100%</i>

Due to the lack of an agent in English passives, using a marker is the most suitable way for translating English passives since there is no device to change to active sentences in Vietnamese while paraphrasing passives will be at the risk of distorting the meaning of ST, and the omission of markers is not always feasible.

In addition, there is a choice of using the marker “*bị*” or “*được*” in the marker strategy, and the marker “*được*” is believed to be used for expressing [+positive], [+favorable] meanings while the marker “*bị*” has [+negative], [+unfavorable] meanings (Bui (2005), Nguyen (2005), Hoang (2015), Luu T.T (2010)). However, the data of this research shows that there are instances in which “*được*” can also be used for neutral meanings:

- (15) [ENG] [...] **a certain critical value, determined** by the rate [...].

[VIET] [...] **một giá trị tới hạn nào đó được xác định** bởi tốc độ [...].

- (16) [ENG] **Any point on such a world-sheet can be described** by two numbers [...].

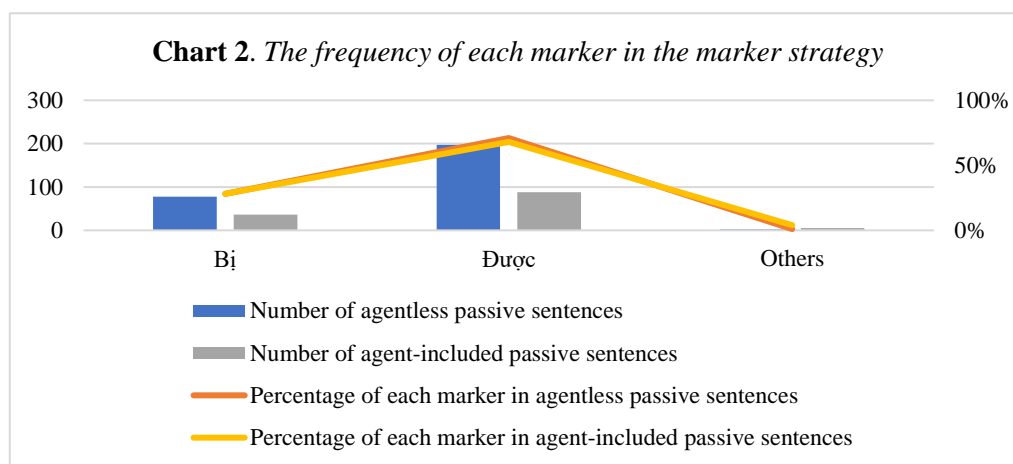
[VIET] **Mỗi điểm trên mặt vũ trụ như thế được mô tả** bởi hai số: [...].

In (15) & (16), “*được*” cannot be replaced by “*bị*” to convey a negative meaning since the main verbs express quite “neutral” a meaning. This accounts for the high percentage of the marker

“*được*”, which is more than double the rate of the marker “*bị*” as presented in table 7. And for this reason, “*được*” should be added a [+neutral] semantic feature.

**Table 7.** *The frequency of each marker in the marker strategy*

Type of English sentences	Marker	<b>Bị</b>	<b>Được</b>	<b>Others</b>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Agentless passives in number</b>		78	197	2	277
Agentless passives in percentage		28%	71%	1%	100%
<b>Agent-included passives in number</b>		36	88	5	129
Agent-included passives in percentage		28%	68%	4%	100%



Additionally, since English scientific texts rely heavily on passive structures to give “*the impression of objectivity and to distance the writer from the statements*” (Baker, 2018, p.115), the marker “*được*” with its [+neutral] semantic feature will be used most frequently to avoid [+positive] or [+negative] meaning in the Vietnamese translation of English scientific and technical writing. The marker “*được*”, however, is found not only to precede the main verbs but also to follow the main verbs with 23 agentless instances in the researcher’s data:

(17) [ENG] **This** can be *done* very accurately.

[VIET] **Điều này** có thể *thực hiện được* một cách rất chính xác.

(18) [ENG] [...] our galaxy is [...] **that** can be *seen using modern telescopes* [...].

[VIET] [...] thiên hà của chúng ta chỉ là [...] **thiên hà** có thể *nhìn thấy được bằng các kính thiên văn hiện đại* [...].

In the above sentences, “*được*” follows main verbs, causing the sentences to lose their passive structure, and the emphasis is not on the passive meaning but on the possibility of conducting the action. With the use of this strategy, main verbs are normally modified by words expressing possibility like “*có thể*” (can) or “*không thể*” (cannot). In the researcher’s data, there are 17 out of 23 instances in which the main verbs are modified by “*có thể*” or “*không thể*”. However, in

these 23 instances, the marker “*được*” can precede before verbs to change the sentences into a typical passive structure. Therefore, it is expected that placing “*được*” after the main verb in agentless passives depends on where the emphasis is.

### *The active strategy and three ways for the change to active forms*

As shown in table 2 and table 6, the active strategy was applied for the translation of 15 agent-included passives and 84 agentless passives in English (in which 23 instances are It-cleft). However, changing an English passive structure into a Vietnamese active form varies according to the type of English passives, the semantic features of agents, and main verbs. Table 8 shows three ways for the change, in which adding an additional subject to convert English passives into an active in TT (abbreviated to “Adding-S”) is the most common method, followed by “Changing to a subject-less active” (abbreviated to “Subjectless active”) with 18% and the least common one is “Converting the agent into the subject in active sentences” (abbreviated to “Convert-the-agent”) with 12%.

**Table 8.** *Three ways of translating English passives into Vietnamese active forms*

No.	Methods of changing to active sentence	Number of instances	Percentage
1	Add an additional subject to change to Vietnamese actives	69	70%
2	Change to a subject-less active	18	18%
3	Convert the agents in English passives into subjects in Vietnamese actives	12	12%
<i>TOTAL</i>		99	100%

Bilber et al. (1999, p.938) stated that the initiator of action in the short dynamic passive was purposely left unexpressed because “*the agent is unknown, redundant, or irrelevant (i.e of particularly low information value)*”. And among 69 instances used the “Adding-S” strategy, there are 51 instances whose agents are left unexpressed and rather irrelevant since the sentences are not concerned with the initiators of the action as in (19) & (20). Such sentences, particularly dummy-subject ones in English, have a high tendency to be translated into Vietnamese actives with an additional subject. In 51 instances, there are 19 It-cleft sentences and 32 sentences that are concerned with generalization rather than specific initiators:

(19) [ENG] It is *believed* that *this force*...

[VIET] *Người ta tin* rằng *lực này* ...

It is remarkable that “additional subjects” in the Vietnamese translation are an “exophoric reference”, which is assumed to “*share worlds outside of the text*” as claimed by McCarthy (1996, p.35), and refers to a group of people, like: “Họ/Người ta” (they), “Ta/chúng ta”(We), “Mọi người” (Everyone) as in (19) & (20). Few “additional subject” are also concerned with an impersonal individual but the added subject must follow “*có*” (have) as in (21):

(20) [ENG] It is *not known* exactly *what length a stadium was*, [...].

[VIET] Hiện nay **ta không biết** chính xác *1 stadia dài bao nhiêu*, [...].

(21) [ENG] Please leave your luggage on the train, **it** will be *taken to the school separately*.

[VIET] Hành lý cứ để lại trên tàu, sẽ **có người mang về** trường sau.

Besides, some English passives can be translated into a subject-less active form in Vietnamese:

(22) [ENG] [...], there is *no spot* that can be *said to be the center* [...].

[VIET] [...], *không thể nói chấm màu nào là trung tâm* [...].

(23) [ENG] [...], even when the electrons **are sent** one at a time, [...].

[VIET] [...], thậm chí cả khi **gửi** mỗi lần một electron, [...]

(24) [ENG] The molecules *can be thought* of as [...].

[VIET] *Có thể xem* những phân tử như, [...]

The above examples, whose unexpressed agents are translated into subjectless actives in Vietnamese. And according to Diep (1996), subject-less sentences can be used in the case that:

- It is used in imperative moods, like: "*Đóng cửa lại!*" (Close the door!)
- It includes words like: "có thể" (can/be able to), "cần" (need, have to), "nên" (should, had better), "phải" (have to, must), etc., like: "*Tóm lại là phải học ...*".
- Its predicate has verbs that express talking activities, recognition, feeling, such as: *nói, cho rằng, nghĩ, trông thấy, trông, xem, etc.*, and in many cases, this kind of verbs refers to an event in general without the presence of a subject, for example: "*Bước vào cổng thôn Đoài, đã thấy nhà ông Nghị Quế*" (Ngô Tất Tố).

Subject-less Vietnamese translations in the researcher's data either include words like "có thể" (can/be able to), "phải" (have to, must) or the predicates that have verbs like "nói", "nhìn", "xem", which are consistent with Diep's studies as in (22) & (24). But the agents referred from these sentences are unclear as in (23) or are tacitly understood as a group of people in general, like "ta/chúng ta" (we) as in (24). And a specific individual agent is hardly added back to the sentence, as in (24b), unless the passive structure is in conditional sentences formed by "(mà)...thì" as in (24c) or in imperative sentences as in (24d):

(24b) ?Anh ta/Cô ấy/Ông David có thể xem những phân tử như....

(24c) [VIET] **Món này mà (bạn) nấu** như vậy *thì* mất ngon.

[ENG] This dish will lose its delicacy if it is cooked in that way

(24d) [VIET] Xe này phải *rửa sạch* đấy!

[ENG] This car must be cleaned

Another way for the change to actives is to convert the agent in agent-included passives to the subject of actives in Vietnamese as in (25) & (26):

(25) [ENG] This was first pointed out by *St. Augustine*.

[VIET] *St. Augustine* (là người đầu tiên) đã chỉ ra điều đó.

(26) [ENG] One of the important pieces of physical evidence was provided by *Einstein*.

[VIET] *Einstein* (là người) đã đưa ra được một bằng chứng vật lý quan trọng.

It is feasible and reasonable to change the above English sentences to Vietnamese actives since we have enough material (the agent) and reason for the conversion (actives are more preferred than passives). Nevertheless, as earlier discussed in 1., this strategy should be used only when the connection between the passives with their previous sentences is loose.

#### *The omission of markers*

The strategy of omitting markers (here called “marker-omitted”) presented in table 1 means that the translators did not use the marker “bị/được” to mark the passive meaning in the TT, but these sentences still reserve the passive meaning:

(27) [ENG] *The other two spatial dimensions* are ignored or, [...]

[VIET] *Hai chiều không gian còn lại sẽ* (~~bị~~) bỏ qua [...]

(28) [ENG] *The steady-state theory*, therefore, had to be abandoned.

[VIET] Do vậy lý thuyết trạng thái bền vững cần phải (~~bị~~) vứt bỏ.

(29) [ENG] One can *observe* what is called [...].

[VIET] Người ta có thể *quan sát được* cái (~~được~~) gọi là [...].

In marker-omitted translations, the marker “bị” or “được” can precede the main verb in the sentence to make it become a typical passive. The term “marker-omitted” in this paper is equal to the “neutral sentence” in Bui’s research (2005), but the frequency of this strategy is rather low (10%), and the marker “bị” or “được” mostly can be used to replace this strategy, which is consistent with the findings of Bui (2005). However, this strategy can only be applied for the Vietnamese translation of agentless passive sentences whose agents are unclear and text-internal (27) & (28). Besides, the patients in such sentences should be inanimate as in the above examples. Other rules for the use of this strategy are as follows:

*The emphasis is on the result; or to announce a change:*

(30) [ENG] Her black hair was *drawn into* a tight bun.

[VIET] Tóc bà *bới thành* một búi chặt.

(31) [ENG] The book has been *sent out*.

[VIET] Sách *đã gửi đi rồi*.

(32) [ENG] Clothes have been *washed*.

[VIET] Quần áo *đã giặt xong*.

Bui (2005) and Hoang (2015) distinguished “neutral” structure (N2 + V) from the typical passive (N2 + marker “được/bị” + V) and argued that predicates in “neutral” structures were not made to be stative (trạng thái hoá) by the marker “bị/được” but by other words that stated the results, time our means, etc. This research supports this idea, and there are 6 instances in the corpus whose main verbs are modified by the word “thành” as in (30). In those sentences, the focus is on the result rather than the passive meaning; hence the marker “bị” or “được” can be omitted. Besides, when the focus is to announce a change, reflected in the occurrence of “đã...rồi/xong” (already), markers can be removed, and as in (31) & (32).

*Some fixed expressions*

Some fixed expressions in Vietnamese, like “sinh ra” (be born), “gọi là” (be called), “xem như” (be regarded), “buộc” (be forced), etc., can be used in “neutral sentences” without the occurrence of markers, as in (33) & (34):

(33) [ENG] One such possibility is **what** are *called* chaotic boundary conditions.

[VIET] Một khả năng là chọn **cái gọi là** điều kiện hỗn độn (*chaotic*) ban đầu.

(34) [ENG] [...] as was *described* in the chapter on black holes

[VIET] [...] như đã miêu tả ở chương nói về các lỗ đen

In some fixed expressions, the combination is normally fixed and the structure of patients is simple, as in (33) the verb “gọi” (call) goes with “là” (to be) and the patient “cái” (what) is only a single word, or in (34) the marker “được” can be omitted when such verbs, like “miêu tả” (describe), “nhắc tới” (mention), “nói” (say), “thảo luận” (discuss), occur in a fixed combination, such as “như đã + V + ở +” (as + be + V<sub>ed</sub> + in). However, in these fixed expressions, the marker “được” or “bị” can also be added to emphasize the passive meaning or when the structure of patients is too complex as in (35):

(35) [ENG] **Another objection to an infinite static universe** is normally *ascribed to the German philosopher* [...].

[VIET] **Một phản bác nữa đối với mô hình vũ trụ tĩnh vô hạn** thường **được xem** là của nhà triết học người Đức [...].

*In some instructions where the focus is on the guidance, possibility rather than passive meanings*

When the focus is on the instruction or possibility rather than the passive voice, the marker-omitted strategy can be used for the translation of agentless passives whose agents are unclear and text-external. In those sentences, main verbs are normally modified by “có thể” (can), “cần phải” (need/should), “không thể” (cannot), “nên” (should) as in (36). In some cases, the removal of markers greatly relies on the focus of possibility with the occurrence of “có thể” (can) or “không thể” (cannot) as in (37), which explains the high frequency of this kind of sentence (38%) in table 9.

(36) [ENG] [...] did not need to be *adjusted to fit the facts* [...].

[VIET] [...] không cần **điều chỉnh** cho phù hợp với thực nghiệm [...].

(37) [ENG] [...] **the infinities** can be *canceled out by a process* [...].

[VIET] [...] **những đại lượng này** đều có thể **loại bỏ** nhờ quá trình [...].

#### **4.1. To avoid conveying positive or negative meanings:**

Bui (2005) stated that “neutral sentences” could be used to avoid expressing a negative meaning or positive meaning; or when those meanings were not transparently expressed in ST. There are 6 instances found in the corpus in which the removal of markers is served for the purpose of avoiding negative and positive meanings as in (38):

(38) [ENG] [...] **the manuscript of his second major book** was *smuggled to a publisher* [...].

[VIET] [...] **một bản thảo của cuốn sách kiệt tác thứ hai của ông** đã **lọt** đến một nhà xuất bản [...].



**Table 9.** *The frequency of each situation in the remove-marker strategy*

No	Situations in which markers are omitted	Number of instances	Percentage
1	Instruction structures	25	38%
2	Fixed expressions	16	24%
3	Emphasis on the result	6	9%
4	Avoid conveying positive or negative meanings	6	9%
5	Others	13	20%
<i>Total</i>		66	100%

### *Other translation strategies*

#### *Paraphrasing*

The strategy “Paraphrase” in table 1 means that the translators changed the structure of ST to a different structure in TT; for example, complex sentences in ST are changed to simple sentences in TT. The term “Paraphrase” in this paper is nearly the same as the term “transposition” first introduced by Vinay and Darbelnet (Newmark, 1998) and later was defined by Newmark (1998, p. 55) as “a translation procedure involving a change in the grammar from SL to TL”. This kind of “shift” can be used when “literal translation is grammatically possible but may not accord with natural usage in the TL”. Table 1 shows that there are 80 instances to which this paraphrasing strategy was applied, accounting for 12%. And 59% (47/80) of those instances were paraphrased due to the translators’ personal style since the marker strategy or the active strategy can be used without distorting the meaning of SL, as in (39) & (40):

(39) [ENG] [...] **the new macromolecule** could not *reproduce* itself and eventually would have been *destroyed*.

[VIET] [...] **những đại phân tử mới** không có khả năng *tự tạo* và do đó *tàn lụi dần*.

[Use markers] **Những đại phân tử mới** không có khả năng *tự tạo* và cuối cùng sẽ **bi tiêu diệt**.

(40) [ENG] ‘No one. **It** was *addressed* to you by mistake,’

[VIET] “*Không ai viết. Nhầm địa chỉ.*”

[Change to actives] “*Không ai cả. Người ta gửi nhầm thôi.*”  
No one. **They send** it by mistake.

Yet, there are English passives that cannot be translated into passive or active structures in Vietnamese due to the lack of equivalence in TT as in (41) & (42), or the complexity of the sentences in ST as in (43):

- (41) [ENG] **Harry** was strongly *reminded* of Dudley.  
 [VIET] **Harry** sức *liên tưởng* đến Dudley.
- (42) [ENG] [...] ‘it’s the only way ... I’ve got to be *taken*.’  
 [VIET] [...] “Đành vậy... chỉ còn cách duy nhất đó... phải *thí tội* thôi.”
- (43) [ENG] [...] in which **alpha-particles**, which are positively charged particles given off by radioactive atoms, are *deflected* [...].  
 [VIET] [...] *sự lệch hướng* của các **hạt alpha** - hạt mang điện dương do các nguyên tử phóng xạ phát ra [...]

In (41), the verb "remind" means "to bring back a memory to someone" and can be used in English passives. Its lexical equivalent in Vietnamese is “nhớ tới” or “nhớ về”, which hardly be used in passive forms. Consequently, the sentence should be paraphrased rather than using a marker as in (41b), which loses its naturalness in TT:

(41b) ?Harry **bị** làm gợi nhớ về Dudley.

Besides, paraphrasing can be used when there is non-equivalence above word level as in (44) & (45), or when other strategies are impracticable.

- (44) [ENG] He was being *made* a cup of strong tea back in Hagrid’s hut.  
 [VIET] Nó đang *làm* một tách trà nóng trong căn chòi của lão Hagrid.
- (45) [ENG] There won’t be any Hogwarts to get *expelled* from!  
 [VIET] E là không còn cả trường Hogwarts để mà *học* đó chứ!

### 5.1. The omission of passive structures

Table 1 shows that the translators occasionally omitted passive structures in ST and did not translate them, such as:

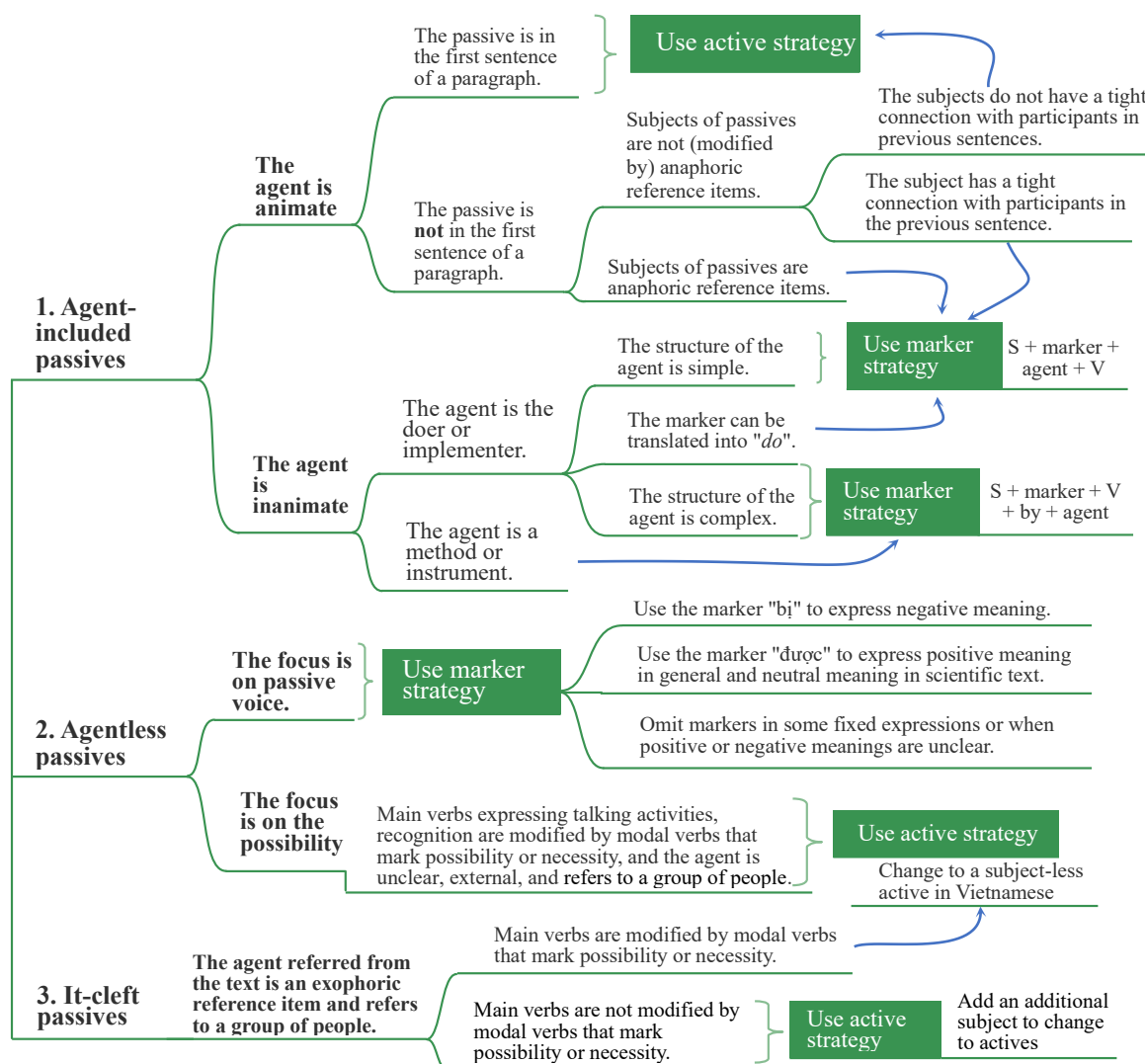
- (46) [ENG] *The time of the event* is then said to be the time halfway....  
 [VIET] *Thời gian xảy ra sự kiện khi đó* (được cho là) sẽ bằng một nửa thời gian...
- (47) [ENG] *This* is simply defined as [...].  
 [VIET] Nó (được định nghĩa) đơn giản là [...]

Baker (2018) claimed that omissions were also a strategy in translation that could be applied when the meaning conveyed by an expression was not “*vital enough to the development of the text*” or “*when the advantages of producing a smooth, readable translation clearly outweigh the value of rendering a particular accurately in a given context*”. And in 21 samples from the researcher's data, the omission does not harm the meaning of ST but produces a shorter translation in TT as in (47). However, according to Baker (2018), this strategy should be used only as a last resort.

*General procedures for the Vietnamese translation of English passives*

Based on the above analysis and findings, this research introduces general procedures for the Vietnamese translation of English passives as presented in chart 3.

**Chart 3.** *General procedures for translating English passive sentences into Vietnamese*



However, the above procedures do not include paraphrasing and are recommended for typical English passives. In practical situations where passives are not the main component of a sentence, the strategy is also influenced by the subject of the main clause and other factors.

## Conclusion

This research examines 672 collected English passives, and its findings indicate that using a marker "bị" or "được" is the most predominant strategy for the Vietnamese translation. And this strategy is almost used for both agent-included passives and agentless passives in English whose subjects are (modified by) anaphoric reference items and have a tight connection with the previous sentence, while the active strategy is normally used for English passives whose agents are animate and when the passives are in the first sentence of a paragraph or when their subjects are not closely linked with the participants in the preceding sentence. Besides, when the marker strategy is applied for English passives, the agent will be placed after the marker like "bị" or "được" and before the main verb in Vietnamese sentence if it is the doer of the action and has a simple structure, otherwise its position is normally after the main verb. Additionally, It-cleft passives are mostly translated into active structures in Vietnamese by adding an additional subject that is an exophoric reference item and refers to a group of people. Another kind of actives in Vietnamese, agentless actives, can also be used for the Vietnamese translation when the focus is mainly on the possibility rather than on the passive voice. Last, a paraphrasing strategy should be used for Vietnamese translations for non-equivalence above word level, but this strategy together with omitting English passives, should be used as the last resort.

This research introduces useful strategies and procedures for translating English passives into Vietnamese. Nevertheless, since the English passives in the research are full passive forms and their Vietnamese translations are limited in terms of genres, the Vietnamese translation strategies and procedures in this research might not be appropriate for short-form English passives or for those which are not the main component of a sentence. Additionally, the translation procedures introduced in this paper may need refining to be applied to the Vietnamese translation of English passives in another kind of genre.

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## Appendix 01

### List of Abbreviations

Adding an additional subject to convert English passives into an active sentence in Vietnamese	Adding-S
After the main verb	After V
Before the main verb	Before V
Change-to-active strategy	Active strategy
Changing to a subject-less active form	Subjectless active
Converting the agent into the subject in active sentences	Convert-the-agent
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	Harry Potter
Marker-using strategy	Marker strategy
Passive marker	Marker
Source text	ST
Target text	TT
The strategy of omitting markers	Marker-omitted
The Vietnamese translation of English passives	Vietnamese translation

## An Analysis of Negative Verbs' Equivalents in a Vietnamese Translation of 'The Call of the Wild'

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### ABSTRACT

Negative verbs in English are regularly translated into Vietnamese as *không* (Doan, 2010). However, in different types of texts and specific contexts, especially in literary ones, the equivalents of negative verbs are quite diverse and distinctive. This study aims to analyze the Vietnamese equivalent diversity of negative verbs detached from the classic literary work – 'The Call of the Wild' by Jack London (1903) (ST) and the translation 'Tiếng gọi của Hoang dã' by Lam Hoai and Vo Quang (2019) (TT). Based on qualitative and text analysis method, after conducting a process of splitting, filtering, and inspecting source and target texts, 164 negative verbs were detached from the ST and their matching equivalents in the TT; *không* and its variants were identified as the dominant equivalent pattern (72.6%). Particularly, some specific equivalents, which were the results of passive-active restructuring (1.8%), negative-positive replacement (6.7%), and other structural, lexical transformations (12.8%), have been investigated for conceivably affecting features of equivalent selections by translators. The obtained results would be a modest part contributing to the vast work of building an English-Vietnamese corpus. The matter plausibly concerns translation issues, yet the outcomes of this study could be applied to translation training and teaching reading comprehension.

#### Keywords:

equivalent, negation, negative verbs, English-Vietnamese translation.

### Introduction

Since Translation Studies and Translation Theory appeared in the 1980s, scholars have been cultivating their studies of translation issues which had "*challenged the long-standing notion of the translation as inferior to the original*" (Bassnett & Trivedi, 2012). Translators and scholars are on the way to pursue better and more complete methods as well as criteria systems for translation. Studies in different levels of language units, top-down and bottom-up approaches, macro to micro issues have been elaborated during the last 40 years (Baker, 2018).



Along with the growth of globalization, translation has been printing its signature in all kinds of forms: books (fiction and non-fiction), textbooks, brochures, advertisements, documents, manuals, subtitles (films and TV shows), etc., and it has not shown any sign of decline. Even though the demand for translation is high, it is not easy to be satisfied. Readers, nowadays, are fastidious people who expect the translation to suit their taste and transfer all propositional contents from the original. Most of the time, translators' clients are not readers but publishers or translation agents. In a severe case, translators may have to face a tight deadline and high-quality requirements, which are hard to achieve.

To meet those requirements, translators need appropriate methods and tactics. In the linguistic aspect, the top-down approach addressing factors such as context or cultural setting is rather favored (Grace, 1998; Komissarov, 1991; Pham, 2021; Prince, 1996; Torop, 2002), but it does not mean that intensive studies into word level, syntax and grammar are less. This bottom-up approach can be a basis and guide for translators in the decision-making process during performing their work (Baker, 2018).

Many studies concerning differences between English and Vietnamese syntax have been released. Prominent issues in these papers are passive voice, collective nouns, pronouns, and tenses (Le, 2011; Ngo, 2006; Ngo, 2008; Tran & Bui, 2021; Vo, 2010). Then, it could be found that negation is one of the unattended matters which should be intensively studied and investigated.

This research is a comparative and exploratory study that aims to identify patterns of English negative verbs and their Vietnamese equivalents. Grounded on the contrastive analysis hypothesis (CAH), which assumes that “a finite structure of a given language that can be documented and compared with another language” (Dost & Bohloulzadeh, 2017), a contrastive comparison at the syntactic level would be conducted on the selected source and target texts. Within the scope and limitation of the study, this research is proceeded only in a literary translation by analyzing the original classic American novel ‘The Call of the Wild’ by Jack London (1903) and its translated text ‘Tiếng gọi của Hoang dã’ by Lam Hoai & Vo Quang (2019).

## Literature review

### *Contrastive analysis hypothesis (CAH)*

The definition of the contrastive analysis hypothesis was elaborated by Lado (1957). From his point of view, language learners have a tendency to transfer some features of their native language, which commonly are forms, meaning, and the distribution of forms and meaning, into the foreign language they are learning. Therefore, in the case of negative transfer where the native and foreign languages are different, it would lead to structural errors in the process of learning the foreign language (Dost & Bohloulzadeh, 2017). In translation, contrastive analysis hypothesis would be applied to identify the techniques of translators in handling

differences between source and target language.

### *Translation criteria*

A prevalent norm in criteria for translation is expecting it to hide the fact that it is a translation (Nida & Taber, 1969). In other words, it should appear as an original work in a target language (TL), some kind of “invisible” translating language (Venuti, 2017). In *A Textbook of Translation* (1988), Newmark ranked naturalness as the fourth – the topmost level in the translating process. It is “a generalized level” and only concerned with reproduction. Besides, naturalness is also the “ease” of understanding (Beekman & Callow, 1974). It means the more readers can be at ease in comprehending the meaning of the text, the more natural the translation is. This “ease” idea was also indicated in Tytler’s (1907) paper as the “ease of original composition.”

### *Negative verbs in English*

Beare (2019) defined negative verbs as combinations between *not* and auxiliaries, including copular verb, *be*, modal verbs, and other auxiliaries (*do, does, did, have, has, and had*). In *Essentials of English Grammar* (2013), it was pointed out that there were two negative structure tendencies: the use of “negative word or element” and the combination of *not* and auxiliaries – negative verbs, which seems more preferred in modern English usage (Jespersen, 2013).

### *Negation equivalents in Vietnamese*

Generally, negation in English can be expressed in negative verb structures (be/auxiliaries/modal verbs + *not*) or in lexical forms (negative affixes, the particle *no/not*, and their variants such as *never, neither, nor*, etc.) (Jespersen, 1917). Correspondingly, in Vietnamese, the most common negative expression is the use of *không* and its synonyms or variants like *chẳng, chẳng, chưa*, etc. This equivalent is applied to both expressions of English negation (Doan, 2010). Besides *không*, it is expected that there are various ways to translate English negation into Vietnamese, which can be either in other Vietnamese negative forms or in non-negative forms. The phenomenon has appeared in other languages such as Danish, German, and Latin (Jespersen, 1917).

Vietnamese equivalents of English negation convey the same meaning but are different from each other in aims and functions (Tran, 2000). Therefore, depending on the structure of the translated sentence and translators' intention, one equivalent can be more preferred to the others. Contrastive studies into a negation of English and Vietnamese mostly emphasized equivalence in structure, syntax, and some semantic features, which lacked intensive consideration of equivalent selection in actual translating work (Zhenya, Luong, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2016; Doan, 2010) or offered alternative solutions. This issue could be aware by many translators and scholars, but it has been still unattended to some extent. This is the gap that the study would like to fill in and apply the obtained results to actual translating work.

### *Research Questions*

The study aims at finding helpful suggestions and practical solutions for the matters of translating into Vietnamese various English expressions of negative verbs. To fulfill this aim,

the text analysis was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the common patterns of English negative verbs' equivalents in the translated text 'Tiếng gọi của Hoang dã'?
2. How are Vietnamese equivalents decided for English negative verb items in 'Tiếng gọi của Hoang dã'?

## Methods

### *Design of the study*

Text analysis is a favorable approach in translation research, especially in the contrastive analysis of original and translated texts to investigate not only the meaning and structures of SL and TL, but also the literary style of translators (Bernard & Ryan, 1998). For a highly artistic and creative performance as literature, only by systematically comparing texts would be able to figure out the underlying cognitive representation (Sherzer & Woodbury, 1987).

The research required an intensive analysis of the texts to be able to explain the trends of selection. Therefore, thorough consideration and evaluation were conducted into grammatical elements and semantic features. For this procedure and the characteristics of the study, the researcher decided to employ the qualitative method in the text analysis approach.

### *Materials*

- 'The Call of the Wild' by Jack London (1903) (hereinafter referred to as ST)

This short adventure novel, first published in 1903, is a masterpiece of Jack London which marked his status as a writer after the Gold Rush in 1897 (Shepherd, 1998). It has also been so well-known in Viet Nam as typical American literature that a passage excerpted from the text appears in the textbook of 9th grade's Literature. Besides, concerning the scope and limitations of this study in terms of time and manpower, the length of this novel is reasonably suitable to be the material of the study.

- 'Tiếng gọi của Hoang dã' by Lam Hoai and Vo Quang (2019) (hereinafter referred to as TT)

The translation by Lam Hoai and Vo Quang (previously known as Nguyen Cong Ai and Vu Tuan Phuong) was first published in November 1983. It is considered as one of the earliest and official Vietnamese versions of 'The Call of the Wild'. The first publication appeared to have some unsought errors, as specified by translators. One of the most notable errors was the title of the translation which was 'Tiếng gọi nơi Hoang dã'. The translators confirmed that the title should be 'Tiếng gọi của Hoang dã' definitely because the former "nơi" would make London's intention of personification "the Wild" disappear (Lam & Vo, 2019).

The later book reprinted in 2019, which was committed to ensuring and maintaining the original's style and writings to the fullest, was again reviewed by the two translators. Vivid evidence for this commitment is that all names of persons and places are original in English and

French. This edition would be hard for young readers, but it is preferable for adult readers, especially English learners. That was the decisive reason for it to be chosen as the material of the research.

### *Data collection and analysis*

Online text tools – Text-splitter and Text-filter (Online text tools - Text splitter, n.d.) were employed to detach all texts containing negative verbs in the ST and their equivalents in the TT, then group and count the occurrences via Microsoft Excel; SDL Trados would be used for fast-tracking Vietnamese equivalents. The human source was the main force of this study.

After grouping and counting, general trends in the usage of English negative verbs and Vietnamese equivalents were exposed. The next process was comparing and analyzing the trend of Vietnamese equivalent patterns in each type of English negative verb pattern to identify the translators' tendency of treating English negative verb items. By intensively inspecting selected items, features of negative equivalent selection would be concluded at the end of the research.

This paper is a comparative study conducting contrastive analysis of negative verbs' structure and Vietnamese equivalents' structure in a certain extent. It would be expected that the syntactic structure of ST and TT would not be equivalent because of the feature of literary translation. Translators might prioritize equivalence in meaning than structure. This is a particular aim of this study which would be considered dissimilar to previous contractive analysis studies in the structure of noun phrases (Vo, 2010) and negation (Doan, 2010) identifying pairs of equivalent structure. The discussion of the study would expose techniques applied by translators to obtain a natural translation.

### *Data coding*

**Table 1.** English negative verb coding

ENGLISH NEGATIVE VERBS (ST)		
Group's name	Description	Code
Be + <i>not</i>	Combination of the copular verb <i>be</i> and <i>not</i> : <i>am not</i> , <i>is not</i> , <i>are not</i> , <i>was not</i> , etc.	E1
Modal + <i>not</i>	Combination of modal verbs and <i>not</i> : <i>could not</i> , <i>would not</i> , <i>should not</i> , etc.	E2
Aux + <i>not</i>	Combination of auxiliaries and <i>not</i> : <i>did not</i> , <i>do not</i> , <i>have not</i> , <i>had not</i> , etc.	E3

**Table 2.** Coding of Vietnamese equivalents of English negative verb items

VIETNAMESE EQUIVALENT (TT)		
Group's name	Description	Code
Single negative marker	The use of negative markers such as <i>không</i> , <i>chẳng</i> , <i>chăng</i> , <i>chưa</i> , <i>đừng</i> , <i>chả</i> , <i>chớ</i> and <i>khỏi</i> .	V1
Negative marker + <i>hề</i>	Cases where <i>hề</i> is added after negative markers for emphasis: <i>không hề</i> , <i>chẳng hề</i> , and <i>chưa hề</i> , etc.	V2
Rejective negation	Negative marker + <i>phải</i> : <i>không phải</i> , <i>chẳng phải</i> , and <i>chưa phải</i> , etc.	V3
Negative predicate	Negative predicates stand at the beginning of a sentence:	V4

	<i>không phải (là), chẳng/chả phải (là), đâu có phải (là), có phải (là) ... đâu, and nào có phải là ... đâu</i>	
Negative indefinite pronouns	Words for general negative proposition: <i>không (có) ai, không (có) gì, không bao giờ, and không nơi nào.</i>	V5
Sino-Vietnamese negative maker	The use of Sino-Vietnamese negative markers such as <i>bất, phi, vô.</i>	V6
Non-negative equivalent	An equivalent of an English negative item which is a non-negative item.	V0

The two tables were adopted from *Essentials of English Grammar* (Jespersen, 2013), *Tiếng Việt - Sơ thảo Ngữ pháp chức năng* (Cao, 1991), and *Tiếng Việt và Thực hành tiếng Việt* (Nguyen, 1995).

## Findings

'The Call of the Wild' is a literary text consisting of seven chapters, 1,620 sentences, and 31,792 words. In this ST, 164 negative verbs appeared in 151 negative sentences. It was detached that there were 617 negative items of all six types of negative structures (as specified in *Essentials of English Grammar* by Jespersen (2013)) detached in ST, which made negative verb items occupied 26.6%.

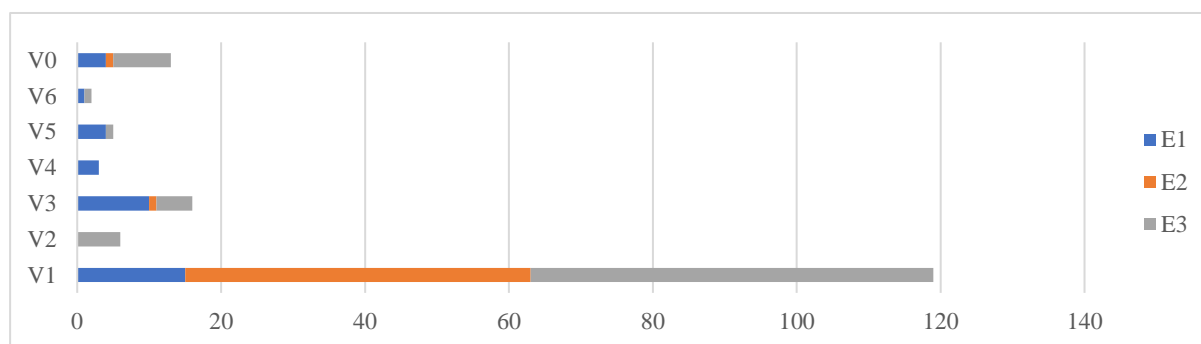
**Table 3.** Occurrences of E groups

Group	Description		Number of occurrences	Percentage
E1	am/is/are	NOT	6	22.6%
	was/were		31	
E2	can/will/must		6	30.5%
	could/would/should		44	
E3	do		5	46.9%
	did/had		72	

As can be seen from Table 3, negative verbs cover three structures: Be + *not* (E1); Modal + *not* (E2) and Aux + *not* (E3). Because of the fiction figure of the ST, most of the sentences are in the past tense (89.6%); a few sentences of present and future tense appeared in dialogues and monologues (10.4%). It appears that E3 is the most dominant pattern, with 77 items occupying 46.9%. The second place is E2 (30.5%), and E1 is the least dominant one within three. Despite the inequality in the number of occurrences among groups, these differences are not actually significant.

**Table 4.** Vietnamese equivalent occurrences

	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V0
E1	15	0	10	3	4	1	4
E2	48	0	1	0	0	0	1
E3	56	6	5	0	1	1	8



**Figure 1.** Vietnamese equivalent patterns

As figured from Table 4 and Figure 1, the absolutely dominant pattern of negative verbs' equivalents in this study is the use of negative markers (V1) such as *không*, *chẳng*, *chả*, *đừng*, and *chưa*. The result is identical to the assessment of Doan (2010) and Zhenya, Luong, Nguyen, and Nguyen (2016) in their papers. This pattern was also dominant in all three English negative verb patterns E1 (40.5%), E2 (96%), and E3 (72%). V2 only appears in E3, and V4 is only the equivalent pattern of E1. V6 is the least dominant pattern, occupying solely 1.2%.

## Discussion

The use of negative markers (V1) such as *không*, *chẳng*, *chả*, *đừng*, and *chưa* was identified as the preferable equivalent for all English negative pattern. In many cases, the negative markers came along with *còn* (*chẳng còn*, *không còn*), *nào/chút nào* (*không...chút nào*, *không...nào*, *chả...nào*), *được* (*không...được*), *gì* (*không...gì*). The appearance of these additional words would make the translation more natural and sensible. They would also imply some propositions such as availability (*còn*), capability (*được*), and expression of emphasis (*nào/chút nào*).

(1a) "Buck saw money pass between them, and **was not** surprised"...

(1b) "Buck nhìn thấy tiền trao qua đổi lại giữa hai người, và **không** ngạc nhiên *chút nào*"...<sup>1</sup>

In this case, the additional word "chút nào" can be omitted, which makes no change in the negative meaning of the sentence, but it would miss the expression of emphasis, which showed how familiar Buck had been with seeing humans pay money for dogs.

The pattern "negative marker + *hề*" (V2) only appeared in a translation of the structure "Aux + *not*". In the same way of other additional words mentioned above, *hề* in some cases can be omitted, except in the example (2) below:

(2a) "Spitz gained his feet almost as though he **had not** been overthrown," ...

(2b) "Spitz lật mình đứng thẳng dậy được ngay như thể vừa rồi **không hề** bị hất ngã," ...

<sup>1</sup> All examples marked 'a' are source texts in English cited from 'The Call of the Wild' (1903); all examples marked 'b' are the target/translated texts in Vietnamese cited from 'Tiếng gọi của Hoang dã' (2019).

*Hề* is added after negative markers for emphasis (Nguyen, 1995). In example (2b), to highlight the contrastive status of before and after Spitz was overthrown, *hề* should be presented.

For rejective negation, or object negation (Doan, 2010), the Vietnamese pattern of "không phải" (*là*) (V3) is perfectly fit to negative structure "Be + not" in expressing rejection of the predicate of "Be + not" and highlighting affirmation of the contrastive predicate. In this sense, the rejection negation is quite different from the negation of relationship, which was identified that it also had the equivalent "không phải" in Vietnamese (Doan, 2010).

(3a) ... "it was everything that **was not** *death*, that *it was aglow and rampant*, expressing itself in movement, flying exultantly under the stars and over the face of dead matter that did not move."

(3b) ... "trong mọi thứ **không phải là cái chết**, mà là *sức sống đang toả ánh chói loà và bùng lên mạnh mẽ*, thể hiện thành chuyển động, hân hoan tung cánh bay dưới những vì sao và trên bề mặt của vật chất chết lặng không hề động đậy."

(4a) "But it **was not** *food* that Buck and the huskies needed, *but rest*."

(4b) "Nhưng điều cần thiết nhất lúc này đối với Buck và lũ chó Eskimo **đâu phải là thức ăn**, mà là *sự nghỉ ngơi*."

In examples (3a) and (4a), predicates of the negative verbs ("death" and "food") are rejected to confirm the right ones ("aglow and rampant" and "rest") specified right after them. In (4a), there is a dummy subject 'it' and a relative 'that' clause distancing the contrastive predicates "food" and "rest" which would make the contradiction less and confuse readers if the order in (4a) was observed. Therefore, translators decided to replace the dummy subject 'it' with the real subject indicated in the relative 'that' clause in (4b) to clarify the idea in the ST and emphasize the contradiction in the use of rejection negation.

Nevertheless, the excellence of translators is also exposed in the way they transformed a non-rejective negation into one.

(5a) "He **did not** mind the hunger so much, but the lack of water caused him severe suffering and fanned his wrath to fever-pitch."

(5b) "Đói ăn **không phải** là điều nó quan tâm nhiều lắm, nhưng khát nước đã làm cho nó cực kỳ khổ sở và thổi bùng sự phẫn nộ của nó lên đến mức như phát sốt."

In the translated text (5b), translators made "the hunger" (*đói ăn*) the subject and turned a normal negative sentence into a rejective negative sentence to emphasize the counterweight of "the hunger" and "the lack of water".

Negative predicate (V4) appeared to be only equivalent to 'it + be + not' structure.

(6a) "Besides, **it was not** the life of the herd, or of the young bulls, that was threatened."

(6b) "Hơn nữa **không phải** là tính mệnh của cả đàn hay tính mệnh của lũ nai đực trẻ bị đe dọa," ...

Even though V5 and V6 patterns (refer to Table 2 for the description) are not dominant in the TT, V6 is indeed the least dominant one. Some equivalents in these groups were found to be

unique and significant. They were appeared to be affected by structure transformation in the English – Vietnamese translation process.

(7a) ... “and he was glad each time when he **was not selected**.”

(7b) ... “mỗi lần **không ai đã động** gì đến nó cả thì nó lại mừng.”

Translators transformed a passive sentence into an active sentence and made a negative verb a sentence with the negative indefinite pronoun '*không ai*' (nobody).

(8a) ... “things which had been as dead and which **had not moved** during the long months of frost.”

(8b) ... “những vật như đã chết và đã im lìm **bất động** trong suốt những tháng dài đông giá.”

This case could be considered as that a negative verb was translated into a positive verb with negative meaning: ‘had **not** moved’ = ‘**không** chuyển động’ = ‘bất động’.

Besides, there was a case where negative verb was neglected in the translation.

(9a) ... “though he speedily taught them their places and what not to do, **he could not teach them what to do**.”

(9b) ... “Mặc dù Buck nhanh chóng dạy được cho chúng ổn định vào vị trí từng con và những gì chúng không được làm.” /NULL/

The most significant finding of this study is the pattern V0 where a negative sentence is translated into a non-negative sentence which could be positive or interrogative.

(10a) “He **did not** know what to say.”

(10b) “Anh biết nói **thế nào bây giờ?**”

In the above example, a negative sentence was turned into a rhetorical question. This is regarded as an “indirect or roundabout means” to express negation (Jespersen, 1917). This type of question was not to be answered but to convey the similar negative meaning of the ST. A gain of the equivalent was making the TT more elegant as required for literature.

(11a) ... “there would be trouble if he **were not left alone**.”

(11b) ... “nếu **cứ động vào** gã thì rồi sẽ có chuyện phiền toái đây.”

There are three transformations in example (11). The first one is to replace the negative verb “were not left alone” by an acronym of “leave alone” which is “pick on” (*động vào*). Then, the passive voice was also transformed into the active voice. Finally, the ‘if’ clause was moved to the initial position, preceding the main clause. These transformations were performed to clearly clarify the idea in the ST and create a more comprehensible, as well as natural expression in the TT.

(12a) “Charles turned his back and drew the lashings down as well as he could, which **was not** in the least **well**.”

(12b) “Charles quay lưng và cố đem hết khả năng của mình ra để rút các dây buộc cho đồng đồ đạc hạ thấp xuống nhưng khả năng của y lại quá **tồi**.”



Similar to the first transformation of example (11), “was not...well” in (12a) was replaced by “bad” (*tôi*) in (12b).

Covering the total of 164 negative verb items in the ST was 164 Vietnamese equivalents appeared in seven patterns. Most of them were translated in a typical way of the presence of *không* and its variants, other negative markers in Vietnamese (72.6%). On the other hand, unique and highlighted solutions for negative verbs in the ST, such as passive-active transformation (1.8%), negative-positive replacement (6.7%), restructuring (12.8%), etc. provided by the two translators were rightly recommended.

## Conclusion

The study had clarified the trends and specified unique selections of Vietnamese equivalents of negative verbs in the ST. The result showed that *không* and its variants were the most favorable equivalent for 164 items of detached negative verbs. Certainly, the appearance and distribution of items under other Vietnamese equivalent patterns have raised the attention for further analysis. It was identified that both syntactic and semantic features of negative verbs and differences in tendencies of English and Vietnamese language usage, such as passive and active voice (1.8%) or the use of dummy subjects (9.1%), influenced the selection of equivalents. It was confirmed that the translators tended to prioritize meaning and naturalness over corresponding in syntax and structure in assigning equivalents. In addition, comprehensibility was as well a great consideration of translators. These references from the translators were supposed to be appropriate and tasteful because this was a literary translation that required significant natural achievements to make the translated text read as literature.

Despite the limitation in genre and number of materials, these humble achievements would benefit students of the English language in general and major in translation and interpret in particular. The trends and tendencies of Vietnamese equivalents of negative verbs concluded in this study might not be generalized outcomes, yet they could be supportive suggestions when an issue concerning negative verbs in actual translating and interpreting work arises. The study mainly processed from the bottom-up approach, based on the syntactic elements, so this could be a reference for translation training and reading comprehension teaching.

Because of a rather specific scope of the study, some aspects have remained and are expected to be discovered. In the process of analyzing the texts, it has appeared that there would be distinctions among variants of *không* (*chẳng, chẳng, chưa, đừng, chả, chớ, and khỏi*); besides, other English negative forms specified by Jespersen (1917), and some indirect negative means in English and Vietnamese, such as questions, exclamations, and ironic expressions, etc. would be further examined in future studies.

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## The Speech Act of Apology by Filipino Call Center Agents

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** speech act, apology, call center, BPO, communication

The Philippines is a global leader in business process outsourcing (BPO). Many foreign investors view the Philippines as a viable location for their call center operations due to the Filipinos' strength in English proficiency. This study focuses on inbound call center accounts that deal with a variety of call situations, ranging from information requests to difficult calls that require more time to handle, such as complaint calls. Since the goal of any business is customer satisfaction, this research aims to investigate how Filipino call center agents mitigate and reduce the liability and guilt towards customers. Results show that the 90 call center representatives have successfully produced 'perfect apologies' by providing all five strategies posited by Cohen et al. (1986) in most of their complaint calls. However, the sequence is distorted by emphasizing more on offering a repair. This leads to a recommendation that calls center training on apology be emphasized on building personal connections rather than a mechanical response to situations.

### Introduction

“I am sorry to hear that.”

This statement summarizes the daily interaction experiences of the call center agents handling inbound complaints calls. How well a call center agent can deal with an irate customer may be influenced by the agent's ability to communicate and carry out a language function called apologizing.

Communication is an interesting area of research since studying communication does not only help people succeed professionally through strong oral and written communication skills but also helps develop life skills such as conflict resolution and critical thinking. It improves understanding of others and builds or even destroys relationships (McGaan, 2010). Another reason for studying communication is any register shifts brought by culture change. Despite a strict rule when to use formal language and informal language at work, the latter has infiltrated

even the dealings and transactions between the client and the associate. This study draws particular interest in conversations between call center agents and their clients. It was revealed that some call center representatives in the United States failed to show empathy to their clients whenever there were complaints. They further argued that choosing the right words would help the representatives express their empathy to their clients (Bowens & Cook, n.d.). Since English, being an international language, is used as the medium of communication, it embodies a variety of cultures, and it cannot be used without a thorough understanding of its own relationships, identities, and experiences (Pham, N. T. L. (2021). Most of the time, choosing the right words is dependent on the feelings of both the speaker and the listener. Informal language is usually preferred when the situation calls for a more relaxed, casual, and spontaneous conversation (“Formal and Informal Language,” 2020). Call centers typically have to deal with angry, dissatisfied, and irate clients. Call center agents are trained to always be in control of the situation. At these times, despite the formal nature of the call center business, informal language in speaking is always seen to help alleviate emotional encounters with clients.

According to Cabigon (2015), the Philippines is one of the largest English-speaking nations where the majority of the constituents can speak English. Furthermore, the proficiency of the Filipinos in the English language is one of the significant factors that made the Philippines the top voice outsourcing destination in the world. However, there is a greater need to enhance the English skills of the labor force, particularly those in the business process outsourcing (BPO) sector, to maintain the proficiency strength of the Philippines. As emphasized by Nishanthi (2018) in (Luu Le Phuong Thanh et al., 2021), English has become an international language and is widely spoken around the world. Thus, individuals must enhance their communication abilities in order to be successful in their chosen industries.

The main goal of any customer support service is customer satisfaction. The ability of customer support to handle dissatisfied and even furious customers can greatly affect any business. According to Porteous (2020), “customer service is the be-all and end-all of good business.” In public service, a complaint and an apology are essential for customer service, and employees must understand the impact of the client’s perception (Belfas & Musyahda, 2015). Thus, it is crucial to understand the apology strategies used by call center agents in handling customer complaints. In this study, the researchers aim to investigate the apology strategies used by the Filipino call center agents, explore the apology patterns used by the Filipino call center agents in receiving complaint calls, and identify effective semantic formulas in making felicitous apology acts. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the dominant semantic classifications of apology strategies manifested in the DCT of the respondents?
- What are the prevailing patterns of semantic formulas observed after classifying the apology strategies used?

## Theoretical Background

This study focuses on the speech act of apology. It is anchored on Speech Act Theory by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). The data are coded and analyzed using Prachanant's (2006) Apology Strategies. The other apology taxonomies that helped the researchers in the conceptualization of this research are also discussed below. Because English has become an international language and is widely spoken around the world, individuals must enhance their communication abilities in order to be successful in their chosen industries.

### *Speech Act Theory*

The words people utter in a speech situation are not only words and mere syntactic structures; they are thoughts, ideas, and emotions. In everyday communication, the words and phrases used by interlocutors perform certain language functions such as greeting, complimenting, ordering, thanking, apologizing, complimenting, among others, called speech acts (Sienes, 2019). The speech act theory was developed by John Austin based on a series of lectures, which were compiled in a short book called *How to Do Things with Words*, released in 1962. John Searle, who added to Austin's views and presented them in a more methodical manner in 1969, expanded on Austin's concepts (Cook, 1989, p. 35).

John Austin (1975) believed that an utterance could be used to perform an act. He pointed out that by uttering a sentence, one can say things and do things. For example, when someone says *I'm sorry for the way I acted*, the person is not only saying, but he is also apologizing. Parker and Riley (2010, p. 8) explained that a speech act has at least two facets: the locutionary act and the illocutionary act. The locutionary act is a description of what the speaker says. It is simply uttering a sentence. A locutionary act is composed of a referring expression with a noun phrase and a predicating expression or a verb phrase. For example, when a customer tells the customer service agent, *You must refund my money*, the referring expression is *you*, and the predication expression is *must refund my money*. On the other hand, an illocutionary act is what the speaker does in uttering a sentence, including acts of stating, requesting, questioning, apologizing, etc. In the example above, *You must refund my money*, the illocutionary act is ordering.

John Searle (1976 in Parker & Riley, 2010, p. 9) classified illocutionary acts into different types: representative, directive, question, commissive, expressive, and declaration. The speech act of apology, which is the focus of this study, is categorized by Searle as expressive. An expressive is an utterance used to express the speaker's emotional state. Other acts in this category include thanking, congratulating, condoling, deploring, objecting, among others.

### *Goffman's (1971) Description of Apology*

Erving Goffman (1971 in Slocum, Allan, & Allan, 2011) defined apology as a speech act that involves the expression of embarrassment and humiliation. It also involves an act of clarification that one knows what conduct had been expected and an act of sympathy with the

application of negative sanction such as verbal rejection, repudiation, and denial of the incorrect way of behaving along with self-condemnation. It constitutes the acceptance of the right way and a declaration to do what is right as manifested in performing repair and compensation. As cited by Kort (1975), Goffman described the apology as a "remedial work." Kort explained that remedial work could be a group action that arises from a social rule violation. Its function is to change what can be perceived as offensive into something acceptable. Kort synthesized that "apology, in keeping with Goffman, is one of the three basic ritual devices along with "account" and "request", which can cause transformation. To give an **account** is to represent oneself as not entirely responsible or is liable to be, thought guilty.

Meanwhile, a **request** asks a potentially offended person to engage in something that could violate his rights. Both account and request services to keep one's actions from being construed as offensive. However, an apology is a ritual device in which the person splits into two social selves.

Brown (2003) in *The Role of Apology in Negotiation* mentioned that Goffman explained apology as a process through which a person symbolically splits "into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offense and the part that dissociates itself from the delict and affirms a belief in the offended rule." Gubin (2000) elaborated this by quoting Goffman's words in his book *Relations in Public* (1971) that says "apologies represent a splitting of the self into a blameworthy part and a part that stands back and sympathizes with the blame giving is by implication, worthy of being brought back into the fold" (p. 2).

Goffman's remedial model (1976) is helpful to understand how call center agents address situations in which the customer always stands at the other side of the spectrum, that is, the one who always has all the rights. In complaint interchanges between the customer and the call center agent, the customer always feels that his rights are violated. It is the customer service representative's role to mediate and fix the "offenses" of the company.

### *Olshtain & Cohen's (1983) Classification of Apology*

In this research, Olshtain and Cohen's model (1983 in Olshtain and Cohen, 1990, p. 47) is employed to classify and categorize the apology strategies of the respondents. The categories include expression of apology, acknowledgment of responsibility, explanation, a promise of forbearance, and offer of repair.

Olshtain and Cohen (1990) explained these five strategies, also called semantic formulas, which compose the set of apologies that may be grouped into two: general (expression of apology and acknowledgment) and specific or situation-constraint procedure (explanation, promise of forbearance, and offer of repair). Olshtain and Cohen (1990) elaborated further that "expression of apology and acknowledgment of responsibility use formulaic, routinized apology expressions (I'm sorry, excuse me, I regret, etc.) and therefore, the expression of responsibility reflects the S's degree of willingness to admit to fault for X. The first two

strategies will be used across different situations while explanation, an offer of repair, and the promise of forbearance are situation-specific and will semantically reflect the content of the situation” (p.47).

According to Cohen et al. (1986 in Jones, 2012), apologies often involve one or more of the five verbal strategies. Jones (2012, pp. 104-105) emphasized that

*“the ‘perfect apology’ contains all of these five elements, even when some or most of them are implicit instead of stated outright. For something to possess the ‘force’ of the apology, however, only one of these strategies is important. In some cases within which only one strategy is employed, however, the speaker leaves it up to the addressee to infer that an apology has been made by relating to the conversational maxims...In many cases, addressees require more than one of the five strategies to be utilized to make the apology complete and sincere.”*

### *Prachanant’s (2006) Apology Strategies*

In a study conducted by Nawamin Prachanant (2006) in the context of hotel business in Thailand, he focused on occurrences of pragmatic strategies and pragmatic transfer in responding to complaints. Using Olshtain and Cohen's (1983), and Frescura's (1993) taxonomy of apology, Prachanant coded and analyzed the data were gathered through a Discourse Completion Tasks questionnaire (DCTs). Findings of the study revealed that the respondents did not only use the five semantic formulas (Items 1-5 below) originally proposed by Olshtain and Cohen, they also used four other strategies (Items 6-9 below). Thus, it was concluded in Prachanant's study that the personnel in the hotel business around Thailand used the following apology strategies or semantic formulas in responding to complaints: 1) expression of apology, 2) acknowledgment of responsibility, 3) explanation, 4) offering repair, 5) promise of forbearance, 6) making the suggestion, 7) giving the time frame for action, 8) asking for information, and 9) gratitude.

Among these nine strategies, the “offering repair” strategy was employed the most frequently to respond to the complaints among the three groups, followed by “expression of apology” and “acknowledgement of responsibility,” respectively.

### **Methodology**

This study aimed to investigate the semantic expressions and apologizing strategies implored by Filipino call center agents. In order to make this possible, the researchers employed a discourse completion task (DCT) to elicit responses from the respondents on how they usually respond to specific complaint calls. DCT is the only available data collection instrument that generates sufficiently large corpora of comparable, systematically varied speech act data



(Ogiermann, 2018). There were eight DCT situations in the researcher-made questionnaire based on the suggestions given by the consultants. The DCT situations were synthesized from consultations with three call center directors, their product specialists, and five call center agents with more than two years of work experience to develop valid complaint scenarios.

After all the suggestions were incorporated, the DCTs underwent a review from the administrators, IT security experts, product managers, and international account managers to ensure accountability and reliability of the DCT situations. With the help of the account managers, the DCTs in Google Form were sent to the work emails of the respondents, and the latter was given five to ten minutes to complete the task during their vacant time, before login, or during non-peak hours.

This study implored discourse analysis to code and analyzed the responses of 90 call center agents. Specifically, this study made use of speech act analysis, anchoring the analysis on the following theories:

- Goffman's (1971) Descriptions of Apology
- Olshtein & Cohen's (1983) Classification of Apology
- Prachanant's (2006) Apology Strategies

The researchers did the coding process, and an encoder tallied the categories. Likewise, the researchers conducted an interview with the CEO of one of the biggest call centers in Asia, who explained the tenets behind the findings of this research. A triangulation of data was conducted through a meeting with the call center management and trainers to present the findings and verify the results. Likewise, a survey of the call center training module to cross-check the apology strategies taught to trainees was also performed.

## Results/Findings and Discussion

The tables below present the data which were gathered through a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The respondents' answers were then coded and categorized.

Table 1

### *Apology Strategies Used by Call Center Agents*

Apology Strategies	Frequency	Percent
Offering repair	739	32.34
Expression of apology	560	24.51
Promise of follow-up action	302	13.22
Empathy	165	7.22
Showing concern	162	7.09
Repetition of complaints	67	2.93
Explanation	63	2.76
Gratitude	53	2.32
Promise of forbearance	45	1.97
Making a suggestion	45	1.97
Acknowledgment of responsibility	43	1.88
Giving the time frame for action	41	1.79
<b>All Strategies Combined</b>	<b>2,285</b>	<b>100</b>

The table shows the different types of apology strategies used by call center agents. The data analysis was initially done by using the strategies formulated by Cohen et al. (1986 in Jones, 2012, p. 104). However, the coding process and data analysis were enhanced using the categorization of apology strategies used by Prachanant (2016) in his study on how to respond to complaints in the hotel business. Thus, the researchers were able to code 12 semantic formulas, which are arranged according to frequency count as they occur in the agents' responses.

Cohen et al. (1986 in Jones, 2012, p. 104) presented five verbal apology strategies such as an expression of apology (I'm sorry); an explanation or account of the situation (We are processing so many orders this week...); an acknowledgment of responsibility (It is our fault...); an offer of repair (How can I make it up to you?), and a promise of forbearance (It will never happen again). According to Jones (2012), it takes one or two apology strategies to be considered a good apology. On the other hand, he emphasized that an utterance can be considered a perfect apology if it has the five specified semantic formulas.

Since this study revolves around inbound calls, it is expected that most calls are requests and complaints call from customers. Inbound calls are phone calls initiated by customers to a

company's customer service. Most customer service teams' primary function is to enhance the customers' experience. According to Belfas & Musyahda (2015), customer service is part of public service. Therefore, she emphasized that "apology strategies are needed in the public services to face a customer's complaint."

The CEO, one of the biggest call centers in the Philippines, emphasizes that the first concession, something done or agreed upon to reach an agreement or improve a situation, is an **apology**. In his statement, their company's data scientist found out that material concessions in the form of gifts and discount coupons do not guarantee loyalty and satisfaction from the customers.

Table 2

***Patterns of Semantic Formulas Used by Call Center Agents***

Apology Strategies	Frequency
Expression of apology + offering repair	1,299
Offering repair + promise of follow-up action	1,041
Empathy + offering repair	904
Offering repair + showing concern	901
Expression of apology + promise of follow-up action	862
Repetition of complaints + offering repair	806
Explanation + offering repair	802
Offering repair + gratitude	792
Expression of apology + repetition of complaints	788
Offering repair + promise of forbearance	784
Offering repair + suggestions	784
<b>All Strategies Combined</b>	<b>9,763</b>

The data show that the semantic formulas of expressing apology and offering repair combined have been identified as the highest number of utterances incurred. This phenomenon may be attributed to a characteristic of the Filipino call center agents, which is overly apologetic. Aside from this, the agents are too focused on the technical part in finding solutions or repairs to the customer's problem that they forget to build a personal emotional connection with the customer. This means that each agent has to make the client well taken care of and properly address his/her concerns.

## Conclusion & Discussion

The analysis of data was done using the following theories: Goffman's (1971) Descriptions of Apology, Olshtein & Cohen's (1983) Classification of Apology, Prachanant's (2006) Apology Strategies, and Cohen et al. (1986) Verbal Strategies. However, it was found out that Prachanant's (2006) model provided the most comprehensive and highly applicable description of the data; thus, coding and analysis of data primarily followed the descriptions of Prachanant (2006).

The researchers were able to code 12 semantic formulas, which are arranged according to frequency count as they occur in the agents' responses. According to Jones (2012), a "good apology" requires one or two apologetic tactics. On the other hand, Cohen et al. (1986 in Jones, 2012) emphasized that an utterance can be considered a perfect apology if it has met all of the following: expression of apology, explanation or account of the situation, acknowledgment of responsibility, an offer of repair, and promise of forbearance.

The data show that the semantic formulas of expressing apology and offering repair combined have been identified as the highest number of utterances incurred. According to the CEO of one of the biggest call centers in the Philippines, this phenomenon may be attributed to a characteristic of the Filipino call center agents, which is overly apologetic. The agents are too focused on the technical part in finding solutions or repairs to the customer's problem that they forget to build a personal emotional connection to the customer.

According to the data, Filipino call center agents have effectively created "perfect apologies" by employing all five Cohen et al. (1986) tactics in the majority of their complaint calls. However, the sequence is distorted by emphasizing more on offering a repair.

The acts of apology of the respondents are rather mechanical than sincere due to the scripts, spiels, and training agents get from the management prompting them to limit their apologies by the book. Due to the lack of personal emotional connections between the agent and the client, the former usually give away concessions rather than provide assurance.

### *Recommendations*

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers would like to recommend that call center training on apology be emphasized on building personal connections rather than on structuring mechanical responses to situations. Second, a study on how clients react or respond to acts of apology by customer associates be done to delineate the acts of apology and their perlocutionary effects on the client. Finally, concerning the second recommendation, another study on what constitutes a felicitous apology in customer service be done to increase apologizing effectiveness in customer relations.

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## A Case Study of Chinese Students Learning Thai as a Foreign Language: Flanders Interaction Analysis Category System

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### ABSTRACT

Interaction in foreign language classrooms has been regarded as a key factor in enhancing learning outcomes (Allwright, 1984; Ginting, 2017; Hanum, 2016). This study examined interactions in a specific university classroom context in Thailand where 28 Chinese students were learning Thai as a foreign language with a Thai teacher. It employed a mix-method design. Quantitative data were gathered based on a modified Flanders' model (Flanders Interaction Analysis Category System or FIACS), and the qualitative data were gathered from classroom observations. The analysis of 90-minute video records and field notes from the observations of three classes reveal the domination of teacher's talk (77.59%), and the minimal students' talk (6.16%). Besides, silence time occupies 16.25%. Out of the total of 22 categories of interaction, no student talk can be categorized as an initiation of talk, and no teacher talk can be categorized as procedural lectures and assigning homework. Characteristics of the interaction varied according to the quantity and categories of talk. Transcription of verbatim from the videos reveals details of the interaction. Findings suggest that quantity, category, and characteristics of talk are interrelated and must all be improved together to increase the quality of interaction to affect student learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** students' perceptions, video-based tasks, the American English File series

## 1. Introduction

According to Brown (2000), and Thomas (1987), interaction is a collaborative process of exchanging ideas, feelings, and thoughts between two or more persons, which will create reciprocal effects on each other. It is also a process of information exchange between multiple objects; thus, individuals express their own views and include receiving and understanding the information transmitted by other interlocutors and responding to it (Hadfield & Hadfield, 2008, River, 1987). When one interlocutor asks a question to another, for instance, the other interlocutor thinks about the question after receiving the information and then gives a reply,



which serves as the input information of the interlocutor.

Flanders (1961) defined teaching as an interactive process where both teachers and students participate. In this process, teachers and students interact with each other and among the students themselves. Interaction is an important part of education and a key factor in teaching outcomes (Allwright, 1984; Ginting, 2017; Hanum, 2017). Allwright (1984) states that successful pedagogy should involve the successful management of classroom interaction. As Hanum (2017) states, interaction can help the teaching and learning process run smoothly, help teachers reach teaching objectives, and enhance the outcome of learning. It is also conducive to the improvement of student's communication ability, cognitive ability, and social ability (Brown & Lee, 2015).

Specifically, interaction plays a significant role in language classrooms in both the teaching and learning processes. Thus, researchers and educators have been of great concern for many years (Afrin, 2018; Ginting, 2017; Nunan, 1991). According to Allwright (1984), the learning process can even be carried out without a pre-designed syllabus and textbooks, but it can never be carried out without interaction. Teachers can learn about students' understanding and mastery of teaching according to their interaction and choose suitable, understandable, and meaningful input information for them in the classroom (Harmer, 2008).

Interaction also plays an important role in the acquisition of a language, including second language (SL) and foreign language (FL). It provides students with real language context and basic input sources (Afrin, 2018; Long, 1996). With the idea that language is learned to be used, interaction in language classrooms provides students with opportunities to practice the target language and produce comprehensible output (Hedge, 2000). It is an effective way to enhance speaking skills (Afrin, 2018; Taous, 2013), which is a crucial part of the language learning process (Kayi, 2006). Moreover, students can seize the opportunity to test their language proficiency through interaction with teachers and classmates. They can also have opportunities to get valuable feedback from teachers and classmates to help improve their language proficiency (Hedge, 2000). Being actively engaged and interacting during the communication process in the language classroom helps facilitate students' second language acquisition (Nunan, 1991).

### *1.1 Significance of the study*

Firstly, the study examined an environment where Chinese students were learning Thai as a FL in Thailand. Chinese students have become a major group of international students in Thailand since 2006 (Luo, 2016). Like many international students who study abroad, this specific group also encounters a lot of problems (Nghiem et al., 2021). The language barrier is one of the biggest stressors of their living in Thailand (Bin, 2009). In addition, there are some factors involved in Chinese students' willingness to learn Thai, including their motivation and perceptions toward the language ( Fang and Chalermnirundorn, 2019; Ye, 2020). Hence, the language learning situation of Chinese students studying in Thailand is a meaningful research topic that has rarely been explored. Importantly, unlike previous studies that apply FIACS as a framework and employ only quantitative data, this study merges both qualitative and quantitative data. As is well-known, quantitative studies can capture a phenomenon, but their analysis is not deep enough, ignoring the participants' and investigators' personal experience and expression (Rahman, 2017). With the mixed-method design, this study can provide meaningful insights and suggestions for teaching and learning of Thai language to Chinese

students residing in Thailand. In-depth findings can also enrich the theoretical system in the field of language teaching and learning, bringing more practical suggestions to FL classrooms.

### *1.2 Research objective*

Holding on to the significance and contributions of interaction on teaching, learning, and language development, this study specifically inquired into the quantity, characteristics, and categories of teachers' talk and students' talk. This is based on the application of the concept of influential Flanders Interaction Analysis Category System or FIACS (Flanders, 1961; Flanders, 1966) and the modified FIACS (Hao, 2007; Mu, Lu & Wang, 2014; Blosser, 1975).

### *1.3 Scope of this study*

This case study was participated by a limited number of Chinese students and one Thai teacher in a specific college context in Thailand. Students' mother tongue is Chinese, and they study Thai as an FL. Based on the demographic data provided by the participants, about half of them had learned the Thai language as pre-college students in the target university for one year or from other language schools. The other half, however, had no background in the Thai language. The teacher's mother tongue is Thai, and she speaks English as a foreign language. During the data gathering process, the language of instruction was mainly Thai, with little use of English. Genders of the participants are not regarded as a variable in this study. The research environment has its own particularity as the students were studying FL in the target language context. With this scope of the study, the generalization of the research results must be taken with caution.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1 Conceptual Framework*

The design of this study adheres to the concept of influential Flanders Interaction Analysis Category System or FIACS (Flanders, 1970) and the modified FIACS (Hao, 2007; Mu, Lu & Wang, 2014; Blosser, 1975). The FIACS is one of the common, widely used systems as a conceptual framework to guide study on classroom interaction. It was created by Ned. A. Flanders at the University of Minnesota in the 1950s. The FIACS is primarily concerned with the emotional climate of the classroom resulting from verbal interaction between teacher and students (Evans, 1970). The original FIACS consists of three sub-categories: "Teacher Talk", "Student Talk" and "Silence". "Teacher Talk" is categorized as "Direct Talk" and "Indirect Talk". "Indirect Talk" includes "Accept Feelings", "Praise or Encouragement", "Accepts or Uses Ideas of Pupils", and "Asking Questions". "Direct Talk" contains "Lecture", "Giving Directions", and "Criticizing or Justifying Authority". "Student Talk" includes "Pupil talk: response" and "Pupil talk: initiation". The last category, "Silence," is about silence and confusion.

The original Flanders system excluded non-verbal interaction. Only the verbal interaction is taken into consideration based on three theoretical assumptions. Firstly, verbal interaction is predominant in a normal classroom situation (Flanders, 1965), and it can serve as a sufficient sample of all classroom behaviors (Singh, Sharma, & Upadhya, 2008). Secondly, although the

use of spoken language sometimes relies on non-verbal gestures, verbal behavior can be observed with higher reliability than non-verbal behavior (Amatari, 2015). Teachers' classroom verbal behavior can be objectively observed by using observation techniques. The observation techniques can record natural behavior patterns, which also allows the measurement process to produce minimal interference to the normal activities of individuals. Thirdly, the teacher's verbal behavior is consistent with his/her non-verbal behavior, which is consistent with the teacher's total behavior (Flanders, 1966).

## *2.2 Application of FIACS in FL classroom*

Interaction in the classroom has been proved to have an important relationship with foreign language acquisition (Tsui, 2001; Afrin, 2018). FIACS, as one commonly used instrument, has also been widely used in the field of interaction study in FL classrooms. Through the application of FIACS, the time and type of teacher and student talking in the classroom and the characteristics of interaction can be reflected. The results are helpful to the improvement of the quantity and quality of classroom interaction. Most of the previous studies included in this review employed Flanders Interaction Analysis Category System (FIACS). These studies provide useful information focusing on the issues of balance of interaction between teachers and students, opportunities for students' participation, and their willingness to initiate interaction.

Concerning the issues of balance of interaction between teachers and students, previous studies have shown that rather than being a collaborative process (River, 1987), interaction in the classroom has been found dominated by teachers because they play a major role in managing the whole language classroom. Research studies using FIACS (Adaba, 2017; Carless, 2008; Chaudron, 1988; Fazio & Lyster, 1997; Gupta, 2004; Hullen, 1989; Nunan, 1991; Sakui, 2004) have shown that teachers talk most of the time in class while students are rarely given opportunities to talk. Teachers have power to distribute learning opportunities for students due to their institutional status (Hall, 1997). They also took the role of a controller and major speaker during teaching (Mulyati, 2013). They exploit time for their own speaking and controlling classroom activities (Afrin, 2018). They had time constraints to cover some class materials included in the examinations and reach the teaching objectives (Indoshi, Bett, and Odera, 2009). As a result of their dominant role, teachers neither adequately organize pair nor group learning opportunities (Gündüz, 2014). This even reduces opportunities for students to interact among themselves.

Regarding opportunities for students, Afrin (2018) and Gündüz (2014) found that the content of students' talk was mostly to answer the teacher's questions, not to ask or answer voluntarily. Studies conducted in Thailand (Cheewagaroon, 2011; Wiriyaichitra, 2002) also show that teachers do not give students opportunities to practice speaking in class, and the content of the course focuses only on grammatical structure. This results in students' lack of opportunities and ability to use English for communication.

As for students' willingness to initiate interaction, Romanel and Kundu (1993) found students to avoid answering questions despite the chance for students to talk. Their reason to refrain was to protect themselves from being punished if they give wrong answers or make mistakes. Bonavetti (2015), Sundari (2017), and Almohizea (2018) also found students to have chances

to communicate with everyone in the class, but they were unwilling and reluctant to speak on their own initiative. Despite opportunities provided, studies have also shown that some Asian students are passive and quiet in language classrooms, which is believed to be caused by cultural factors (Chowdhury, 2005).

### *2.3 Studies to improve the quality of classroom interaction*

In accordance with the issues raised in the literature, many researchers have put efforts to improve interaction in the classroom so that it brings about benefits for teaching and learning. These studies have revealed an association between the quality of interaction and the students' achievement, their social performance, and language learning enhancement.

Allen and associates (2011) explored the relationship between the teacher-student interaction and the achievement of secondary school students. Data was gathered from one secondary school with 78 teachers and 2237 students. A web-mediated approach was implemented as an intervention to improve the quality of interaction between the teachers and students. Findings suggest a link between the improvement of the quality of interaction between teachers and students and the student's achievement. In another study, Allen and associates (2013) explored the teacher interactions with adolescent students and found the quality of interaction to be a predictor of student learning outcomes. The quality of interaction described in the study includes how the teachers are sensitive to the adolescent students' needs and recognize the student needs for interaction with their peers and independence in activity participation. In addition to learning achievement, teacher-student interaction affected students' cognitive, social, and emotional growth and enhanced their mental well-being. Another study on teacher-student interaction by Hughes, Cavell and Willson (2001) with 993 third-grade and fourth-grade students showed that the interaction affected students' social performance by affecting the perceptions of each other. Conflicting teacher-student interaction can lead to peer rejection, which would significantly impact the self-esteem of students and lead to several negative social outcomes (Hughes et al., 1999).

In addition to the effects of classroom interaction on students' achievement improvement and social behavior development, interaction in FL classrooms can enhance students' language learning. Interaction helps promote the development of language learning as shown in Long's study in 1996. Long (1996) explored the role of corrective feedback (CF) and negotiation of meaning (NOM) in classroom interaction between native speakers and second language (L2) students and among L2 students. The study adopted a pretest-treatment-posttest design with six participants: two native English speakers, two Chinese L1 speakers with high English proficiency, and two Chinese L1 speakers with low English proficiency. The error rate of all students was found to decrease from pretest to post-test, especially the Chinese L1 speakers with low English proficiency. This supports the view that CF and NOM can promote the development of the L2 (Long, 1996). Speaking is a crucial part of the language learning process (Kayi, 2012), and interaction is an effective way to enhance speaking skills. Taous (2013) investigated the role of classroom interaction in improving speaking skills in language classrooms with three different groups of students from Local Mean Decomposition (LMD) third-year classes at Biskra University. By observing the classroom and interviewing the teacher, the researcher indicated that learner-learner interaction was one of the key factors in improving students' speaking skills. In Afrin's study (2018), classroom interaction was signified as necessary to develop students' speaking skills because it provided opportunities for students

to practice their speaking skills in the classroom as they had inadequate opportunities to practice it outside the classroom.

### *2.4 Research Questions*

To understand interaction in classrooms between Chinese students learning Thai as a foreign language and their teacher, and the interaction among the students themselves, this study was conducted to answer the research question:

What are the quantity, characteristics, and categories of teacher's talk and students' talk based on a modified FIACS in a Thai language class where Chinese college students are studying Thai as an FL?

## **3. Methods**

### *3.1 Pedagogical Setting & Participants Recruitment*

This study was conducted at Hope University (pseudonym), which is located in northern Thailand. The volunteer participants were one Thai teacher and 28 Chinese students studying in their sophomore year of “Business Thai” majors from International College in the target university. The class where the research was conducted was purposely sampled as it was a context where Chinese students were studying Thai as a foreign language. Despite the university's purposive sampling procedure and convenience sampling, participation of the teacher and the students was voluntary. During the informed consent process, the researcher explained all the details about the research, all the participating procedures, and the rights of the participants.

### *3.2 Design of the Study*

This study employed a mixed-method design that included collecting quantitative data using the FIACS scale to calculate the frequency, percentage, and ratio of teacher talk and student talk. The calculation reflects the quantity, characteristics, and categories of the talk. Qualitative data were also gathered from three classes using video records of lessons and field notes from observations.

### *3.3 Research Instrument and data collection*

#### *3.3.1 The modified Flanders scale*

Even though the FIACS is one of the most applied instruments in interaction analysis, current scholars state that there are several limitations in the original FIACS. Firstly, FIACS does not classify lecturing, so it is impossible to analyze teachers' teaching more in-depth. Secondly, FIACS generalizes all the questions into "Ask questions", so the quality and nature of teachers' questions cannot be analyzed. Thirdly, the FIACS system does not involve the application of information technology in classroom teaching, while multimedia equipment is an important teaching tool in contemporary teaching (Mu, Lu, & Wang, 2014). Fourthly, FIACS classifies silence or chaos in the classroom as the silence that is not helpful to teaching. In the real classroom, however, students need silent time to think independently and to complete tasks. This silence is considered helpful for teaching and learning. Fifth, in FIACS, teachers' teaching

behavior is mainly observed, and only three items analyze students' behavior. In order to make up for the limitations of the original Flanders scale, Hao (2007), and Mu, Lu and Wang (2014) add more items to the scale.

According to Mu, Lu and Wang (2014), the 4th item, "Comments on students' answer," is added since it is another kind of response from teachers which is not covered in the original scale. Compared to the original FIACS, the modified scale classifies the 6th item, "Ask questions," into two sub-categories, "Ask open-ended questions" and "Ask closed questions," since they are two different types of questions in terms of purposes and forms (Blosser, P. E., 1975). As for the 7th item, "Lecturing" is divided into three sub-items: declarative lecture, procedural lecture, and technical lecture. Declarative lecture refers to teachers providing facts or opinions on content or steps. The procedural lecture refers to teachers' knowledge about the steps of producing behavior, such as teaching operation rules, experimental operations, for example. Technical lecture refers to the use of multimedia technology by teachers to cooperate with teaching, such as using slides while demonstrating and explaining technology-manipulated teaching content. The last item is "Silence". This is classified into three sub-categories: "Silence or confusion that contributes to teaching", "Silence or confusion that doesn't help teaching", and "Silence that couldn't be identified by observation" because silence can be either beneficial or detrimental to classroom teaching. Hao (2007), also adds a category on students' talk among themselves. The students' talk is categorized into "Teacher-student talk" and "Student-student talk" to tell the interaction between students and teacher and with peers apart. Additionally, individual and collective talk between teachers and students are analyzed.

As for this study, the modified FIACS (Hao, 2007; and Mu, Lu and Wang; 2014) are slightly adapted in terms of the details of sub-categories to make items more specific for data coding. The adoption includes: 1) adding of specific details of item 5 "Giving directions" to be "Giving directions about classroom tasks and activities"; 2) putting declarative lecture, procedural lecture, and technical lecture as sub-categories of lecture, item 7; 3) breaking down item 8 of teacher talk in four sub-categories including "Begin the class", "End the class", "Monitor students' behavior", and "Assign homework".

Based on the original Flanders scale, the modified FIACS, and the adaptation of the scale for the study, FIACS used for data collection of this study has 12 major categories, which contain a total of 22 sub-categories of interaction (Table 1).

Prior to the study, the tool was tried out in an observation of a class where Chinese students were learning Thai in a private language school in Thailand. The class had three students and a Thai teacher. The class was observed for 45 minutes. The modified formulas were also tried out for the categorization of the 5 minutes record data in the pilot study. The Flanders scale and all the formulas were found applicable for the analysis process.

**Table 1.** The modified Flanders scale

Major category		Second level category		Sub-category							
		1	Accept feeling								
		2	Praises or encourages								
		3	Accept or use ideas of students								
		4	Comments on students' answer								
		5	Giving direction about classroom task and activities								
Teacher talk		6	Ask questions	6.1	Ask open-ended questions						
				6.2	Ask closed questions						
		7	Lecturing	7.1	Declarative lecture						
				7.2	Procedural lecture						
				7.3	Technical lecture						
		8	Others	8.1	Begin the class						
				8.2	End the class						
				8.3	Monitor students' behavior						
				8.4	Assign homework						
		Student talk		Teacher-student talk		9	Individually	9.1	Res	9.1.1	Passively
									ponse		9.1.2
				9.2	Initiate		Initiate to ask questions				
Student respond collectively					10						
Student-student talk		11	Students communicate with each other								
Silence		12		Silence or confusion		12.1	contributes to teaching				
						12.2	does not contribute teaching				
						12.3	cannot be identified by observation				

### 3.3.2 Classroom recording

To accurately capture interaction in the observed classes, all three classes were video recorded. A camera was set up in the corner of the classroom where both the image and sound of the

entire lessons were covered. As suggested by Dörnyei (2016), the record data provide a more objective account of events and behaviors than second-hand self-report data.

### *3.3.3 Field notes*

In addition to the video records, field notes were also taken during observations to gather more comprehensive and missing information in the classroom. This is to avoid 'literal blind spots. As remarked by Zuengler, Ford, & Fassnacht (1998), even though the video can help with uncovering the subtle reality of classroom life, it cannot avoid literal blind spots and the distraction caused by the camera will inevitably affect the data collection process.

## *3.4 Data analysis*

### *3.4.1 The analysis of Flanders scale and formulas*

The procedures for data analysis follow the initial research design by Flanders (1961) of encoding and decoding. With the recorded data from three “Thai Culture” classes, each of which lasted for about 2-3 hours, 30 minutes from each class was chosen as a representation which can be considered long enough compared with previous studies. With the selection of each 30 minutes, 5 minutes were taken as a unit of observation. The interval time between the six pieces of observation time was decided according to the length of the class. For example, the first-class lasted for 120 minutes, so the interval time between every 5 minutes observation is 15 minutes  $(5+15)*6=120'$ ). After categorizing all the interactions in the classroom, a matrix was created to analyze the characteristics of the interactions. Because there are 22 sub-categories, a  $22 \times 22$  matrix was created and each sub-category of interaction occupy one column and one row. The matrix finally contains 600 tallies from each of the three videos. After adding up “10” in the beginning and the end of the series, there are 602 tallies in each video. There are overall  $601 \times 3 = 1803$  pairs of numbers in the summary matrix which includes the data of all three videos. The tallies from this matrix are used to calculate quantity, categories, and interaction characteristics, as shown in Table 2 and Table 3.

To ensure the accuracy of data coding, both researchers categorized the recorded data separately and then compared the two sets of analysis results. For the different categorizations of interaction, both researchers reviewed the video and discussed until they both agreed with the categorization.

### *3.4.2 Transcription of class records and field notes*

Verbatim were transcribed from the 90-minute video records to show evidence of verbal interaction in different categories. Field notes were analyzed and quoted to merge all the data to answer the research questions.



## 4. Results

To answer the research question on what the quantity, characteristics, and categories of teacher's talk and students' talk are based on a modified FIACS in a Thai language class where Chinese college students are studying Thai as a FL, findings are reported in three sections: 1) findings on the quantity of interaction; 2) findings on characteristics of interaction; and 3) findings on categories of interaction.

### *4.1 Findings on the quantity of interaction*

Table 2 shows the quantity of interaction in percentage compared between the categories of Teacher Talk, Student Talk, and Silence based on the data gathered from the context of this study. In this table, C1 to C22 refer to all second-level categories and sub-categories of interaction as in Table 1.

Overall, the verbal interaction of the teacher categorized into 11 out of 14 types occupies 77.59%; verbal interaction of the students categorized into 4 out of 5 types occupies 6.16%; and silence categorized into all 3 categories takes up 16.25%.

Most of the teacher talk covers the declarative lecture (45.04%) and technical lecture (21.63%) and ask open-ended questions (2.83%) with no evidence of teacher procedural lecturing, ending class, and assigning homework. Most of the student talk covers passive responses by individual students (2.44%) and students' communication with each other (2.11%) without evidence of student initiation to ask questions. This shows a large gap between the teacher talk and the student talk. Field notes from observation also reflect the difference in the quantity of the talk of the teacher and the students. Silence covers almost three times as much of the student talk time.

Within the category of silence, silence or confusion that contributes to teaching takes up the highest percentage (8.60%) of time. This covers a wider range of time than the silence that does not help teaching (1.77%). During the time of silence, the teacher was observed to pause while lecturing to spend time writing or typing in front of the class and frequently searched for online materials. This led to the time of silence in class, which can be considered beneficial for the teaching-learning process.

**Table 2.** Quantity and categories of interaction

Major categories	2 <sup>nd</sup> level categories	Sub-categories	Frequency	percentage
Teacher Talk	Indirect Teacher Talk	C1 Accept feeling	3	0.16
		C2 Praises or encourages	3	0.16
		C3 Accept or use ideas of students	42	2.33
		C6 Ask open-ended questions	51	2.83
		C7 Ask closed questions	38	2.11
	Direct Teacher Talk	C4 Comments on students' answer	11	0.61
		C5 Giving direction about classroom task and activities	40	2.22
		C8 Declarative lecture	812	45.04
		C9 Procedural lecture	0	0.00
		C10 Technical lecture	390	21.63
		C11 Begin the class	5	0.28
		C12 End the class	0	0.00
		C13 Monitor students' behavior	4	0.22
		C14 Assign homework	0	0.00
Student Talk	Teacher-student talk	C15 Passively response by individual student	44	2.45
		C16 Voluntarily response by individual student	19	1.05
		C17 Student initiate to ask questions	0	0.00
		C18 Student respond collectively	10	0.55
	Student-student talk	C19 Students communicate with each other	38	2.11
Silence	C20 Silence or confusion that contributes to teaching	155	8.60	
	C21 Silence or confusion that does not help teaching	32	1.77	
	C22 Silence that cannot be identified by observation	106	5.88	
Total			1803	100

#### 4.2 Findings on characteristics of interaction

This section presents the findings on the characteristics of the interaction. Characteristics of teacher talk and student talk are calculated in ratio, as shown in Table 3.

For all the items, except for items four and seven, the first two columns show the corresponding number and the characteristics of the interaction percentage when put in the Flanders formula for calculation. The third column shows the modified formulas, and the fourth column displays the results after the calculation. Unlike other items, items 4 and 7 show the quantity and characteristics of interaction as well as the ratio between direct and indirect talk and the ratio

between positive and negative reinforcement, respectively. Rather than being calculated in percentage, the number shown in these two items is the ratio.

**Table 3.** Percentage and ratio of interaction based on the Flanders Formulas

NO.	Type	Formula	Results
1	Teacher Talk Ratio (TT)	$\frac{C1+C2+C3+C4+C5+C6+C7+C8}{\text{The total number of categories}} \times 100$	77.59
2	Indirect Teacher Talk Ratio (ITT)	$\frac{C1+C2+C3+C6}{\text{The total number of categories}} \times 100$	7.6
3	Direct Teacher Talk Ratio (DTT)	$\frac{C4+C5+C7+C8}{\text{The total number of categories}} \times 100$	69.99
4	Indirect and Direct Ratio (I/D)*	$\frac{C1+C2+C3+C6}{C4+C5+C7+C8}$	0.11
5	Teacher Response Ratio (TRR)	$\frac{C1+C2+C3}{C1+C2+C3+C4+C5+C8} \times 100$	44.44
6	Teacher Question Ratio (TQR)	$\frac{C6}{C6+C7} \times 100$	6.89
7	Teacher positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement ratio*	$\frac{C1+C2+C3}{C4+C5+C8}$	0.27
8	Pupil's Talk Ratio (PT)	$\frac{C9+C10+C11}{\text{The total number of categories}} \times 100$	6.16
9	Pupil Initiation Ratio (PIR)	$\frac{C9.2}{C9+C10+C11} \times 100$	0
10	Content Cross-Ratio (CCR)	$\frac{C6+C7}{\text{The total number of categories}} \times 100$	71.6
11	Steady State Ratio (SSR)	$\frac{\text{Total 12 diagonal cells}}{\text{The total number of categories}} \times 100$	83.69
12	Silence or Confusion Ratio (SC)	$\frac{C12}{\text{The total number of categories}} \times 100$	16.25

#### 4.2.1 Teacher Talk

Based on items 1-7 and 10, teacher talk ratio reflects four characteristics of teacher talk: 1) direct or indirect; 2) teacher's asking and responding to questions; 3) teacher's positive and negative reinforcement; and 4) teacher's questions and lecture in relation to the total number of categories.

##### 4.2.1.1 Indirect and Direct Talk

Regarding the ratio of indirect and direct talk, which is 0.11, teacher's talk is much more direct than indirect. The teacher tended to comment on students' answers, give directions about classroom tasks and activities, lectures, give short talks to begin the class, and make statements

to monitor students' behavior rather than to accept students' feelings, praise or encourage them, accept or use their ideas, and ask them questions. Praises and encouragement are rarely found in the teacher's talk.

#### *4.2.2 Asking and Responding to Questions*

Items 5 and 6 in Table 3 show the Teacher Response Ratio (TRR), which indicates the teacher's tendency to react to the ideas and feelings of the students. The ratio provides an index of the emotional climate in the classroom. As found in this study, the TRR is 44.44%. This shows that the teacher sometimes responded to the students. When she responded to the students, the teacher was observed to repeat the students' answers but not to use them. The most common way of the teacher responding to the students was to repeat students' answers. The repetition of the students' answers was observed to show the teacher's agreement of students' answers. The extension of the students' answers was rarely observed. Accordingly, the interaction between the teacher and students was observed to be in the form of simple and short sentences. Comments on students' answers, and praise or encouragement were rarely found.

Teacher Question Ratio (TQR), which points to the tendency of the teacher to ask questions during the content-oriented part of the class, is 6.89 %. The low number reveals that the teacher tended not to ask questions during the time spent to focus on the content. Data from observations and field notes also reveal that the same questions were asked to every student in the classroom.

##### *4.2.1.3 Positive and Negative Reinforcement*

Item 7 in Table 3 shows the ratio of positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement provided by the teacher. The positive teacher reinforcement and negative reinforcement ratio of this study are 0.27. This indicates rare evidence of the teacher accepting students' feelings, praising or encouraging them, and accepting or using their ideas. Observation data also support this finding.

##### *4.2.1.4 Content Cross-Ratio*

Item 10 in Table 3 shows Content Cross-Ratio (CCR), which indicates the emphasis given to the content coverage during classroom transactions, which shows the percentage of time that the teacher uses to focus on the content by lecturing and asking questions. The ratio of this study is 71.6%. This means that the teacher frequently spent the time lecturing and asking questions out of the total time recorded. Observations and field notes offer evidence of the teacher talking about the content, reflecting a marginally high degree of lecturing than asking questions.

#### *4.2.2 Student Talk*

Item 8 shows Pupil's Talk Ratio (PT), which refers to the verbal interaction of students in the classroom. The PT ratio of 6.16% represents the students' amount of time in the total recorded class time (90 minutes). This finding reflects that the students rarely talked during the class.

Item 9 shows Pupil Initiation Ratio (PIR), which indicates that the proportion of students' talk is judged to be an act of initiation. The PI ratio of zero means that the students never initiated any talk in the classes observed. Field notes revealed that students answered the teacher's questions voluntarily or passively, and together or individually. The answering of questions individually and passively occupies the largest proportion in students' talk. When the teacher raised a question to the class, only a few students answered. One student was observed to refuse

to join the writing activity in class. The students were also observed to talk among themselves when the teacher raised a question and while the teacher was teaching.

#### *4.2.3 Steady-State Ratio*

Item 11 in Table 3 shows the Steady State Ratio (SSR). This is an index that represents a sustained level of verbal interchange and steady talk between teacher and students. This formula reflects the teacher and students' tendency to remain in the same category for periods longer than 3 seconds. The high percentage SSR ratio of 83.69% reflects that the teacher talk, the student talk, and silence usually remain steady in the same category.

#### *4.2.4 Silence*

Item 12 in table 3 indicates Silence or Confusion Ratio (SC), which refers to the percentage of time that silence filled up the classroom. This study's silence ratio was 16.25% of the total teaching recorded time (90 minutes). Field notes and recording data show that silence occurred after the teacher asked a question while the teacher was fixing, teaching her PowerPoint slides, or dealing with the problems of technological equipment.

### *4.3 Findings on categories of interaction*

Verbatim transcribed from the video illustrates both teacher and student talk in some categories. The categories of talk can be referred to in Table 1.

#### *4.3.1 Categories of teacher talk*

Below are examples of statements made by teachers to accept the feelings of the students are the following:

At one point, the teacher encouraged a student to participate in class by writing a Thai word on board in front of the class. The student refused to do so but said he could say it. The teacher acknowledged the student's choice to speak instead of writing. The conversation ended there without the student saying a word and with the teacher moving on with her own saying of the word.

Teacher: Come, come and write. (with handing the marker to a student)

Student: I can just speak. (In fact, this student did not say anything after that)

Teacher: Alright, you can speak.

(transcription of class one observation between 01:02:26-01:02:32 mins from the second video)

Here is a conversation capturing what the teacher said to accept or use ideas of the students from the third video. Student A was assigned to ask a riddle and some classmates answered at the same time. The teacher always repeated the students' answers. Comments on the students' answers were minimal.

Student A: What has two ears and four eyes, feeling so bored and putting legs on the ears?  
students: Glasses.

Teacher: This, two ears and four eyes.

Student B: Frying pan.

Teacher: The answer is already glasses. (the class laughed)

(transcription of class one observation between 48:36-49:12 mins from the third video)

This is another example to illustrate that the teacher accepted or used ideas of students by

repeating and extending students' answers.

Student A: กาล [A Thai word referring to time]

Teacher: Ahh, it means "time", right? Ok, how about student B's answer?

Student B: 'จาก' or บริ'จาก' [A Thai word referring to "leave" or a part of the word that means donate จาก and จาก in Thai are pronounced the same way, but the meaning can be different depending on the context and the prefix.]

Teacher: How to write it?

Student B: จอจาน สระอา กอไก่ [the student spelt in Thai]

Teacher: จอจาน สระอา กอไก่ จอจาน สระอา กอไก่ [the teacher repeated the student's answer twice] There are two words with this pronunciation, right? One means "leave", and the other one is one part in the word "donate", right?

Student B: Yes.

Teacher: OK, yes.

(transcription of class one observation between 12:26-13:00 mins from the second video)

The following verbatim also illustrates how the teacher interacts with students by repeating the questions and the students' answers, as well as the students' short answer.

Teacher: A, do you know any northern language?

Student A: (in low voice)

Teacher: What?

Student A: ชาวบาท (20 baht in northern Thai language)

Teacher: It means what?

Student: 20 baht.

Teacher: 20 baht, ok.

Teacher: B, Do you know any northern languages?

Student B: (A Thai word)

Teacher: (Repeat), it means what?

Student B: Don't want it.

Teacher: Don't want it. Ok, C, do you know any northern language?

(transcription of class one observation between 26:51-27:06 mins from the first video)

Directions for classroom tasks and activities are found in the following two pieces of verbatim. The first one occurred when the teacher required each student to find a riddle and share with the class, but the students kept silent.

Teacher: Go on, go on, the one who finishes first can go home first.

(transcription of class one observation between 49:24-49:30 mins from the third video)

The second conversation happened when the teacher encouraged the students to write a Thai word with a specific sound on the whiteboard. The teacher kept giving more directions and guidance when the students stayed passive, and at last, she asked one of the students to write on the whiteboard.

Teacher: It needs to be the "an" sound, the "an" sound; any alphabet will work.

Silence time from 01:03:59 to 01:04:32, some students were discussing with classmates in low voices.

Teacher: Can be any word with the “an” sound.

Student A: (A Thai word)

Teacher: (repeated) Come to write it.

Then the student went to write it out on the whiteboard.

(transcription of class one observation between 01:03:50-01:05:29 mins from the second video)

Questions the teacher asked included both open-ended and closed-ended questions. This kind of pattern of questioning and answering questions was found to be common and consistent in all the video records. Open-ended questions were observed to be only those that required memory or recalled information. Only recall and memory questions were typically asked.

Teacher: A, do you know any northern Thai words?

Student A: Yes, I know.

Teacher: Ok, which word do you know?

Student A: [The student answered 5 northern Thai words]

Teacher kept saying “Uh-huh” in the beginning, and later started to repeat each word after the student.

Teacher: It’s ok, share some with your friends, leave them some words.

Teacher: “จ๊กกั่ม”[a northern Thai word means “lie”] means what?

Students: จ๊กจ๊ก [means “lie” in Thai, the students said this word together]

Teacher: It means what?

Student B: Lie.

Teacher: Lie, ok.

(transcription of class observation between 27:54-28:27 mins from the first video)

Teacher talk also included motoring of students’ behavior which is shown as below.

Teacher: Come late.

(transcription of class observation between 10:39-10:42 mins from the first video)

Teacher: Loudly.

(transcription of class observation between 27:21-27:24 mins from the first video)

#### 4.3.2 Categories of student talk

Most of the students talk among themselves happened after the teacher's question. This conversation occurred when the teacher was encouraging and waiting for someone to write an answer in front of the class.

Teacher: So who’s gonna come to write?

Student A: Student B.

Student B: Not me, not me.

Student A: It should be you, you figured it out.

[Then Student B came to write.]

(transcription of class observation between 01:03:38-01:03:50 mins from the second video)

Each student was assigned to do an activity by looking for a riddle from the Internet to ask the class to solve it. This conversation happened when one of the students asked the class to solve

a riddle, and two other students were discussing the answer.

Student A: It should be walking all the time, if it stops, it dies.

Student B: She said it's "clock".

(transcription of class observation between 47:33-47:45 mins from the third video)

This conversation ended with the teacher continuing to ask other students to share their riddles.

## 5. Discussion

Interaction in the classroom under investigation takes into account quantity, characteristics, and categories of teacher and student talk, as well as silence that fills up the classroom. All these aspects of the interaction are interrelated; therefore, they are discussed as interrelated. This leads to three points of discussion: quantity of interaction; quality of interaction, which involves characteristics and categories of teacher and student talk; and role of silence. Another point of discussion is how the findings provide insights into pedagogical perspectives in general.

### 5.1 *Quantity of interaction*

In the context of this study, the teacher was found to be the main interlocutor in oral activities and played the dominant role in class. This provides similar findings to some previous studies using the FIACS (Mulyati, 2013; Nugroho, 2011; Putri & Pulungan, 2014). This is considered normal as teachers have the power to distribute learning opportunities for students because of their institutional status (Hall, 1997) as well as their identities (Jeanjaroonsri, 2018). However, according to Afrin (2018) and Gündüz (2014), teachers' dominant speech in a language classroom can negatively affect students' language learning results. In addition to the high quantity of talk, the high percentage Steady State Ratio (83.69%) also reflects that the teacher kept lecturing for a long time. In such a continuous one-way teaching process of the teacher, the students could only passively accept the information transmitted by the teacher. This leads to insufficient opportunities for students to actively participate in the interaction. They were neither given enough opportunities to talk to each other, and their interactions were not conducive to their studying. In fact, the interaction between students has also been proved to be beneficial to students' language learning and social outcomes (Webb, 1982; Webb, 1984; Battistich, Solomon & Delucchi, 1993).

Despite this finding, however, the teacher was observed trying to encourage the students to participate at some points during the lesson, but the students remained unresponsive. The teacher was observed to repeat her questions several times, provided more clues, gave the students alternative ways of responding such as writing the response onboard instead of an oral response and even provided a long and adequate wait time. Relevant research, including that of second language acquisition, in fact, indicates that students' individual differences (Hoang, 2021) and personal characters such as motivation (Nugroho, 2017), confidence (Fassinger, 1995), nervousness (Smith, 1992), shyness (McCroskey & Richmond, 1991), being afraid of making mistakes, being compared with peers, and being corrected by others (Smith, 1992) are found to be factors to affect students' interaction.

What is more, although previous scholars put emphasis on the importance of students' talking time in foreign language classrooms (Paul, 2003), the quantity of interaction is not directly related to the quality of interaction, and adequate interaction cannot guarantee efficient language learning (Zhao, 2013). Therefore, reducing the teacher talking time alone can increase the student talk or not is still questionable.



### *5.2 Quality of interaction (characteristics and categories of interaction)*

In some studies, teachers are not the center of the classroom, and the proportion of students speaking is very high, but the results show that the quantity of students taking the initiative to speak is very small (Bonavetti, 2015). Students' initiation has been proved to promote comprehensible input and output and thus language learning (Garton, 2002). In this study, "Passively response by individual students" takes the largest proportion in students' talk, and "Initiate to ask questions" was not found. This leads to another question on the quality of interaction which is related to the characteristics and categories of teacher and student talk.

Previous studies have also shown that teacher-related factors such as teaching style, the difficulty of materials, the content of class (Mustapha & Rahman & Yunus, 2010), intelligibility of directions (Abebe & Deneke, 2015), the length of wait time for students to answer questions (Tsui, 2001), and the grouping strategies that the teacher use during activities; for example, individual, pair, or group work (Riasati, 2012; Tsui, 2001), praises and encouragement (Smith, 1992; Liu, 2001), teacher questioning (Tsui, 2001), and teacher feedback (Brinton, 2014) affect students' interaction. Evidence from this study pinpoints the effects of some of these factors.

The teacher rarely accepted students' feelings, praised and encouraged them, nor accepted and used their ideas. Whether the teacher praises and encourages students when they make efforts in class also affect students' utterances (Smith, 1992; Liu, 2001). In the classrooms observed, when the students answered the teacher's questions correctly, the teacher acknowledged the students' answers only by repeating them. The students were neither praised for their responses nor encouraged to expand their answers.

Teacher questioning is another factor found to affect the students' interaction. Data show that the teacher asked closed-ended and open-ended questions with relatively equal proportions. The open-ended questions asked, however, were recall or memory questions. The teacher was observed to intentionally ask these types of questions to elicit the students' talk as much as possible while the students still rarely responded. Since the questions required the same information as the answers, when the students answered as the whole class, only some said the answers. Students' insufficient expression to teachers will also lead to insufficient feedback from teachers; that is, the interactive cycle between teachers and students cannot be completed. Tsui (2001) maintains that "teacher question" is one of the crucial components in teacher-related factors that affect students' interaction. This is because the complexity of the questions asked by the teacher decides the number of responses from the students.

### *5.3 Role of silence*

In this study, the time of silence or confusion occupies almost three times as much as the students' talk. The silence was observed to occur mainly after the teacher asked questions. Bolitho (2006) claims that high-quality talk frequently includes thoughtful silences. According to his view of points, the type of silence which can take place after a good question is "educationally valuable because it promotes thinking, and if it happens frequently, students will come to understand it and make use of it as a time for them to order their thoughts and to find the right way of expressing them". Based on the researcher's observation and video record, the students' silence usually ended up with one of the students replying with the correct answer, meaning that students were actively thinking about the question. This indicates that such silence is beneficial. Other situations where silence usually took place were when the teacher spent time on her own in front of the class, modifying slides, dealing with the teaching equipment,

and writing or typing slides for students. The previous study claims that excessive silence can have various negative effects, as it is the absence of L2 oral practice (Cardenas, 2013). Therefore, attention should be paid to the amount of silent time, whether it supports the teaching and learning process or not, especially in a foreign language classroom.

#### *5.4 Pedagogical perspective*

Generally, findings suggest the target classroom be teacher-centered since the teacher had the primary responsibility (Mascolo, 2009). As opposed to student-centered classrooms, negative effects are caused by teacher-centered classrooms, such as the inadequacy of opportunities for the students to interact. Still, as suggested by Murphy, Eduljee, and Croteau (2021), some previous research studies inform that students prefer teacher-centered teaching methods. These students prefer teachers to help them impart and construct knowledge and skills (Serin, 2018). The point is not whether a teacher-center classroom should be replaced with a student-center classroom or not, but that teachers are recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching that promotes active learning. Foreign language teachers are particularly recommended to engage students in using the language in real-life contexts as much as possible, and interaction among the students themselves is also needed (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011).

### **Conclusion**

This mix-method study is conducted based on the Flanders Interaction Analysis Category System (FIACS) in an FL classroom where Chinese students learn Thai.

In-depth data provides insights into a better understanding of the situations in which teachers tend to play a dominant role in class. With the teachers playing more of a role, the process of information exchange (Hanum, 2017) between teachers and students and among the students might not be smooth. Students' communication, cognitive, and social ability (Brown & Lee, 2015) might not be well developed. Language teachers, in particular, are recommended to be mindful of the quantity of their role in class, not to limit the students' opportunities to play their role. As well, they are recommended to pay attention to improving the quality of their interaction to support the students' learning and help students improve the quality of their interaction. In language teaching and learning, especially foreign language learning, as in this study, Chinese students' first language is totally different from Thai as a foreign language; teachers need to try harder to understand their students. If teachers can find out what makes the students refrain from class participation, they can better apply strategies or techniques to create, sustain, and expand the students' interaction. Various methods of increasing students' talking time, especially voluntary talking time, should be conducted. The silence time can also be beneficial as long as the content and amount are suitable in an FL classroom.

The generalization of the findings of this study must be taken with caution due to the limitation of the number of participants (twenty-eight students and one teacher). This study focuses on only verbal interaction.

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## Vietnamese Learners' Performance in The IELTS Writing Task 2: Problems, Causes, and Suggestions


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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** IELTS Writing Task 2, IELTS Band Descriptors, Writing Problems, Causes, Writing Suggestions

IELTS is popular in Vietnam thanks to its reliability and applicability. Writing task 2 has been acknowledged to be the most challenging for IELTS learners. However, in Vietnam, not much research has attempted to investigate in an in-depth manner as to what are the problems, causes, and consequently the suggestions of such a notion. The research hence aims to investigate the phenomenon in a more thorough, empirical manner. To this end, the study employed the participation of 205 IELTS learners from two language centers in Ho Chi Minh city to provide their opinions regarding the problems, causes, and recommendations deemed the most pressing, acute, and beneficial, respectively. With convenience sampling and survey being the chosen research design, the research was quantitative in nature, producing numerical data as a result. Further analysis conducted via comparing the means of the items listed in the questionnaire yielded based on the IELTS band descriptors managed to discover a series of problems, causes, and suggestions considered the most relevant to the Vietnamese learners concerning IELTS writing task 2. The research thus served as the basis for teachers and learners of IELTS writing task 2 to identify the recurrent issues and provide relatable approaches.

### Introduction

#### *Background of the study*

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) has significantly developed and is now witnessing a rise in popularity, especially in Vietnam (Nguyen & Tran, 2018). It assesses candidates' English proficiency to verify whether they are qualified for higher academic study, with English being the language of instructions (Clapham, 1996). Therefore, IELTS is likely

the key to a better future for all students, as it grants students access to prestigious universities and colleges abroad – obviously only if their band scores meet the prerequisites. Besides, globalization is a booming trend, resulting in international corporations establishing branches in foreign countries (Kordos & Vojtovic, 2016). This is why employees in Vietnam are required to be able to communicate in English, and IELTS is one of the examinations that can confirm this. As a result, it is sufficient to say that not only are students attracted to IELTS, but adults also find IELTS an irresistible opportunity to enhance their careers.

### *Statement of the problem*

Among the four skill tests, the writing test is often considered the most challenging because writing is believed to be a complicated skills, in terms of both learning and assessment, and it is a crucial element of tertiary education (Uysal, 2009). Therefore, having to write an essay with an indicated style is never an easy feat to any test taker, especially those who are inadequately competent in English. Besides, the time constraint further sophisticates the task as students have to complete the two tasks within an hour.

In 2019, the average band of the writing test of Vietnamese candidates was only 5.7 – the lowest in the four tests (IELTS, n.d.). This suggests that IELTS test-takers in Vietnam are clearly struggling with the skill in general and Task 2 specifically, which explains why many learners resort to IELTS centers to improve their writing skills. Hence, learners' poor performance in Task 2 leads to a low band in the overall band for writing skills, hindering their academic development and preventing them from achieving their desired goals, either in their study or work. Furthermore, in Vietnam, IELTS is also one of the requirements for university or college graduation. This translates into heavy stress on Vietnamese students who have to attain the IELTS certificate so as to graduate. It is also worth noting that for people not majoring in English, the problem is even more exacerbated. They often find it difficult to construct sentences and paragraphs that are fundamental in Task 2 (Tran, 2016).

### *Aim of the study*

Taking that into account, this study aims to investigate learners' problems in IELTS Writing Task 2 and identify their causes, thus suggesting appropriate solutions to the aforementioned. High school students, tertiary students, and adult learners are the main subjects in this study because they account for a majority of test-takers.

### *Significance of the study*

There are currently plenty of articles and books addressing EFL learners' writing skills and the IELTS writing test. However, studies on Vietnamese learners' difficulties in IELTS Writing Task 2 are limited at best. With this research, Vietnamese learners' problems can be identified in a detailed manner, which is of relevance in Vietnam. Henceforth, this paper seeks to bring practical measures which IELTS trainers in Vietnam can apply in their classrooms so that learners' performance in Task 2 can significantly enhance overall.

## Literature review

It is clear that many Vietnamese candidates struggle a great deal with the writing test, which calls for the need to identify what problems they have, their causes, and ways to improve their writing skills. Therefore, this chapter attempts to review and discuss related literature regarding IELTS Writing Task 2, learners' problems with the causes, and some suggestions on how to improve the performance in Task 2. These are deemed essential because it is necessary to understand what has been studied in this field, hence establishing the basis of this study as well as identifying the gap, if any, between the literature and the context of the study, Vietnam. The reviewed works can date back to the late 20th century, and there are even some recent studies on the matter at hand.

### *The IELTS test*

IELTS was first introduced in 1980 and started to be accepted as a requirement for courses in English-speaking countries in 1989 with two general tests – Listening and Speaking – and two specialized tests – Reading and Writing. (Charge & Taylor, 1997). The examination is co-owned by the British Council, IDP, and Cambridge Assessment English (IELTS, n.d.) and held in 120 countries around the world, being one of the most prevalent tests (Uysal, 2009). IELTS (n.d.) states that this test is to evaluate candidates' English proficiency using a 0–9 band scale and is also reliable. There are two test modules for test-takers to choose from general training and academic. While the former serves the purpose of migration and employment, the latter assesses whether examinees are qualified for undergraduate or postgraduate study using English as the medium (University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate [UCLES], 2004). It was reported that 77% of the candidates took the academic module (IELTS, n.d.), which is reasonable because this module is required for university or college entrance, and many of the test attendees are students; however, it is undoubtedly more difficult than the other module owing to the need to employ academic language.

### *IELTS Writing Task 2*

An IELTS academic writing test includes two tasks, which weigh more points and requires candidates to write a short essay of at least 250 words on a particular topic with academic or semi-formal or neutral language (IELTS, n.d.; UCLES, 2004; Uysal, 2009). This, according to Uysal (2009), is similar to a non-academic form of discourse or the genre essay. The task includes a topic and a question, in which candidates have to address the topic and present relevant opinions that display their views on the matter in a formal manner (Cullen, 2017). Notably, topics are closely related to the fields for which candidates apply in their undergraduate or postgraduate programs (UCLES, 2004). Despite this, any learner attempting to take IELTS must have some prior knowledge about general social issues so as to perform well in this task (Wilson, 2010).

Test takers' works are marked based on the band descriptors by IELTS examiners (Uysal, 2009). The band descriptors include four criteria for assessment: task achievement (TA), coherence and cohesion (CC), lexical resource (CC), and grammatical range and accuracy (GRA) (British

Council, n.d.; UCLES, 2004). Each criterion is described on a 0–9 scale, with each band denoting particular abilities of candidates. Additionally, the description from band 0 to 9 in a continuum increases in importance (Pearson, 2018).

Task achievement refers to how examinees establish and support their position in response to the given topic by expressing relevant opinions and giving instances while ensuring the essay length (Bagheri & Riasati, 2016; UCLES, 2004). According to UCLES (2004), coherence and cohesion assess how the essay is constructed in general. More specifically, coherence addresses the connection of ideas, while cohesion concerns candidates' ability to use cohesive devices. By taking into consideration task achievement and coherence and cohesion, Cullen (2017) summarized that test takers have to write formally at least 250 words talking about the topic at hand with supporting arguments, logically organize their opinions in paragraphs, each of which focuses on one main idea, and clarify their ideas with explanations and examples. Lastly, lexical resource and grammatical range and accuracy involve the diversity, precision, and appropriateness in vocabulary use and grammar use, respectively (UCLES, 2004).

The band descriptors developed by British Council (n.d.) have provided a valuable basis for identifying IELTS learners' problems. Henceforth, any problem discussed is going to be referred to one of the four marking criteria.

#### *Problems of IELTS learners and candidates in Task 2*

Before looking at studies about problems in terms of the four criteria, some background research addressing IELTS Writing Task 2 in general will be discussed. As Cullen (2017) puts it, writing is the most difficult skill to be proficient in, and many people describe writing a painstaking task. In actuality, candidates may suffer from severe stress when taking the writing test in view of the restriction of time and the unexpectedness of topics, as well as their mentality (Pearson, 2018). To elaborate, Slater (2002) found that candidates face problems due to the prompt of the task. Since test takers are non-native English speakers and their culture is different from that of their English counterparts, it can take them longer to be able to comprehend what the task means fully. Another problem pointed out by Slater is planning under time constraint. He explains that some candidates, when planning, cannot come up with ideas to support their arguments, ending up having to discard the current plan and opting for another one, which consumes a great amount of time. These studies have provided an overview of how challenging the test is from the candidates' perspective.

With regard to examinees' work, the less competent they are, the higher rate of errors and types of errors they make, especially in LR and GRA (Müller, 2015). Alavi et al. (2020) discovered that test-takers commit many more mistakes in terms of TA compared to other criteria. In agreement with this, Cullen (2017) states that examinees often misunderstand the task as a result of ignoring the background information given in the task or identifying too broad a topic. This leads to the essay going off-topic and unclear. Another problem pointed out by Bagheri and Riasati (2016) is that the writing is not adequately focused and the aspects of the topic are not equally addressed. This is, in some ways, connected to the problem mentioned by Cullen

(2017), which she claims to inhibit candidates from improving their band scores. In addition, the lack of knowledge about the topic in the task can also be a critical problem for any test taker since they have no idea on what to write despite having a wide range of vocabulary (Liu & Deng, 2019). As discussed earlier, the topic presented in the test is unpredictable (Pearson, 2018), and examinees need to possess enough background knowledge so as to cope with it (Wilson, 2010).

In contrast, Panahi and Mohammaditabar (2015) highlighted that, in Iran, students are weakest at CC. Their study finds that candidates cannot link the ideas, hence unable to show clear development in their essays, and find producing a cohesive and coherent essay troublesome. Farid and Saifuddin (2018) support this by declaring essay structure is the most common error made by test takers. Moreover, Bagheri and Riasati (2016) observed that reference and substitution are limited and there are mistakes in the use of cohesive devices. They also identify the lack of topic sentences and find the division of paragraphs confusing. Liu and Deng (2019) add that there is duplication and conflicts in the supporting ideas, showing that candidates do not have a clear structure of a paragraph. Moreover, many learners are misled about what a high band entails; they tend to think that creating a long and complicated sentence with many ideas may help boost the score, but this proves otherwise since a long sentence can obstruct the ability to recognize the main idea (Cullen, 2017).

Regarding LR, examinees often display their incompetence in using vocabulary. This includes the poor use of collocations and idiomatic language, mistakes in spelling and word formation, and improper use of words (Bagheri & Riasati, 2016). Liu and Deng (2019) emphasized the problem of paraphrasing of candidates. As long as they are not capable of paraphrasing, they exhibit their limited range of vocabulary, thus lowering their scores. Using memorized words is also a serious issue as test-takers are prone to fill their essays with uncommon words thinking that rare words will enhance their bands, resulting in texts full of inaccurate word use (Liu & Deng, 2019). Though there has been a rise in students using dictionaries – both paper and online – to assist them with acquiring new lexical items, the endeavor does not ensure that they will use them right (Trinh et al., 2021).

One of the problems associated with grammar is the overuse of complex structures (Cullen, 2017). Though essays employing more multi-clause sentences tend to yield a higher band score compared to those relying on single-clause counterparts (Tran & Truong, 2021), according to Cullen (2017), using too many complex structures can lead to adverse effects as they complicate the writing. Instead, she claims that complex structures are only beneficial when they are used to elaborate ideas appropriately. Similarly, Liu and Deng (2019) believe that long and complicated sentences induce tediousness for readers. They also suggest that an essay with too many simple sentences yields the same results because examinees only show a lack of variety in structures. Additionally, learners' writing also contains a number of punctuation and grammatical errors (Bagheri & Riasati, 2016).

Although the opinions of different authors about the criterion with the most serious problems vary, it is necessary to bear in mind that all existing problems amount to a low band score in

candidates' test results, no matter what the problems are related to. However, since these problems are spotted outside Vietnam, more research needs to be carried out in terms of Vietnamese IELTS learners since overgeneralization is not advisable.

### *Causes of problems*

Upon investigating the reasons behind the problems, Bagheri and Riasati (2016) elicit responses from both teachers and learners who participated in their study, discovering that both subjects hold the same opinions. They believe that the existing problems stem from a number of factors, including the lack of exposure of learners to English. This is due to English being a foreign language and constrained access to English media. Besides, the curriculum pays little attention to writing skills, inducing plagiarism and copying in large classes. The authors also reveal that unqualified teachers also amount to the problems as they receive poor professional training, leading to them being more willing to teach reading and listening rather than writing. In addition, learners are not encouraged to write and thus hold negative attitudes towards writing, not to mention their anxiety and influence of their mother tongue. Last but not least, the deficiency of available technological facilities also hinders learners' improvement in writing skills, and learners feel demotivated (Bagheri & Riasati, 2016). Simply put, this study highlights the common factors causing problems in learners' performance in Task 2, which appear in every aspect of education.

To be more specific, Cullen (2017) pinpoints different factors causing test takers' problems. With regard to the reason why IELTS learners misunderstand the topic, she explains that there are many unauthentic sources that contain practice tests far away from the real test in terms of content. These materials usually include tasks which demand specialized knowledge, which does not adhere to IELTS design principles. By relying on those materials, learners are more likely to be confused by the task, hence leading to misunderstanding. She also finds out that many IELTS trainees follow false beliefs and unverified claims about IELTS, which turns them into mechanical writers. Because of this, test takers are often misled into writing lengthy and wordy sentences with unclear and unfocused messages, as well as overwhelming their writing with uncommon words with limited control. Furthermore, she significantly adds that culture plays a pivotal role in Task 2. It may be the reason why examinees lack ideas when they are to write about some particular topics; apart from that, culture also induces the cyclical writing style in some Eastern countries, whereas IELTS requires candidates to write in a linear manner. In some cultures, it is problematic when a learner is not educated to be autonomous but is always dependent. (Cullen, 2017).

Pearson (2018), on the other hand, directs his attention to teacher training and available resources. He emphasizes that there is an absence in training teachers to give feedback, so it is obvious that many learners receive ineffective comments from their teachers. Similarly, there does not exist any practical guideline for teachers to follow, which results in imbalanced feedback across four criteria from teachers (Pearson, 2018). Plus, IELTS materials for test preparation still follow an old approach, not taking learners' factors into account; hence they present numerous exam tips, which can cause confusion (Wilson, 2010).

### *Suggestions on how to improve learners' and candidates' performance*

Learners ought to be responsible for their writing development. Cullen (2017) advised IELTS learners to be aware of available resources online in order to avoid unreliable ones. Moreover, she highlights the need to learn the language deliberately, especially vocabulary and grammar, and not hold any wrong IELTS claims. Candidates should also thoroughly comprehend the band descriptors so that they can meet the requirements to reach their desired bands. Cullen (2017) maintained that band 6 and below examinees tend to adopt an ineffective approach, occurring in only three steps: read, write, and check. Instead, she states that candidates at a higher level opt for a more rigorous one, including read, think, plan, write, and check. This approach is more detailed and achievable so that the time required for writing is reduced and all the requirements can be met (Cullen, 2017). This is particularly useful for any IELTS trainee attempting to conduct self-study.

What teachers teach and their techniques have to aid the development of writing skills, including planning and strategies in the exam room (Brown, 1998), and they should look for approaches for effective teaching, especially with the use of technology (Wilson, 2010). Collaborative writing can considerably help learners improve their writing regarding TA (Khodabakhshzadeh & Samadi, 2018). Not only that, Khodabakhshzadeh and Samadi (2018) claimed this activity to be useful in enhancing motivation in class, developing vocabulary range, and gaining more insights into writing through working cooperatively. Ameri-Golestan and Nezakat-Alhossaini (2013), in addition, praised the role of consciousness-raising for drawing learners' attention to the four criteria, which is far more efficient than explicit instructions. Moreover, Farahani and Pahlevansadegh (2019) encouraged teachers to focus on the metadiscourse aspect of IELTS with the aim to improve learners' control in the coherence and cohesion of their work. Teachers can also exhibit different examples and materials so as to get learners to be better at using cohesive devices and references, hence making their essays more coherent and cohesive (Ly, 2010; Marashi, 2021; Panahi & Mohammaditabar, 2015). In addition to this, exercises and avoidance of using uncommon words are also advisable in vocabulary learning, which can improve learners' band in LR (Panahi & Mohammaditabar, 2015). Besides that, Mickan and Slater (2003) accentuated text analysis in teaching. They claim that teachers should recognize the lexical items typical to a particular text type and teach them to learners. This makes sure that learners are capable of dealing with different types of text, which they are required to write using the language they have learned. Teachers should also pay more attention to the careful selection of words, especially academic ones, to teach learners (Awwalia & Suhardi, 2020). Model essays can also be advantageous to learners, especially those who are at least at the intermediate level because such writing from native or native-like people can have learners attend to the language more (Abe, 2008; Bagheri & Zare, 2009), recognize holes in their knowledge (Bishop, 2011), and learn prefabricated chunks (Mohseni & Satariyan, 2013). Abe (2008) also promoted the importance of instructions to get learners, especially less competent ones, to notice the language. On another note, mind mapping is a great technique that can help learners explore the topic more deeply, enlarge the vocabulary range, correct grammatical mistakes, and write the essay more efficiently (Pratiwi et al., 2016).

A positive relationship between emotional intelligence enhancement and writing skill is identified by Ebrahimi et al. (2018) after they had their participants do the IELTS and EQ tests, which is what teachers may exploit in the classroom in terms of affective factors. Various techniques emerge in plenty of studies, dealing with distinct problems in the four criteria; therefore, they may stand a high chance of being applied in Vietnam because the four criteria are also in use universally.

Feedback from the teachers can help learners detect what they are good at as well as what they should improve (Noor, 2020). Among six ways to give corrective feedback, Sanavi and Nemati (2014) highly recommended using reformulation from which learners can benefit a great deal. Nevertheless, they also suggest that teachers should consider learners' perspectives of the best strategy, as those of learners might differ from the teachers'. Nevertheless, Ganji (2009) criticized teachers' correction for being inefficient and believes that it is feedback from peers and self-correction that work best for learners. Whether the teacher's corrective feedback is useful or not cannot be proclaimed. These studies are conducted in a specific country only, and hence, their universal validity has to be questioned. However, it is certain that there is no available protocol regarding how to provide feedback, due to which Pearson (2018) asserted that IELTS institutions ought to establish their methods to provide comments for learners. He believes that this should help test takers be better prepared for the examination and assist novice teachers in the feedback process.

### *Synthesis*

A number of existing studies have examined IELTS Writing Task 2, problems of candidates with connected causes, and measures to combat the problems. They have also yielded valuable insights into the problem stated in this paper. However, the works which have been analyzed were mainly conducted in the Middle East, especially Iran, which therefore may not be completely true to the context in Vietnam but can be beneficial to some extent.

Since there is insufficient work on the problems of Vietnamese test-takers as well as their causes, this paper attempts to further investigate this area and impart several corresponding suggestions. [**Font: Time New Roman; size 12; citations of APA styles**]

### *Research Questions*

In accordance with the proposed aims, three research questions are posited as follows:

1. What are the Vietnamese learners' problems in IELTS Writing Task 2?
2. What are the causes of the problems that Vietnamese learners face in IELTS Writing Task 2?
3. What are the suggestions to resolve the problems that Vietnamese learners encounter in IELTS Writing Task 2?



## Methods

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

The study was held at two English centers, namely IPP IELTS and WESET English Center, where learners who intend to obtain the IELTS certificate come to enroll in courses specially tailored to them. The two institutions are both situated in Ho Chi Minh city, the larger of the two metropolises in Vietnam, where learning for the IELTS examination has become more common, and the IELTS examinations are densely organized.

205 participants who were concurrently attending different IELTS courses at the two aforementioned centers were chosen to take part in the survey, which according to Fraenkel et al. (2012), fell into the acceptable range for surveys to produce statistically significant results. They hailed from various levels of education, and their level of English proficiency ranged from pre-intermediate to advanced. However, students who were below senior high school education were deliberately omitted on account of the remarkably small number of them undergoing IELTS training courses at the two centers. Though they belonged to distinct brackets of English proficiency, they all attended classes in either of the two language centers where they received instructions and guidance on IELTS Writing Task 2. Therefore, it could be concluded that the research opted for a convenience sampling procedure since the participants were in close proximity to the researchers and that they barely had anything in common save for the fact that they had been taught IELTS Writing Task 2 by either of the researching team members (Creswell, 2012).

### *Design of the Study and Research Instruments*

The study was to verify and clarify the most pressing among the problems, causes, and subsequent suggestions for the IELTS Writing Task 2 learning process in the Vietnamese context via the participants' personal attitudes and beliefs. According to Creswell (2012), the appearance of a trend to be investigated and the need to collect relevant numerical data converge at the fact that the study is quantitative in nature. Of the designs at the disposal of typical quantitative research, the survey was compatible with the research's aim, which was to measure and then point out the most trending problems, causes, and suggestions that the Vietnamese learners suffer and benefit from, orderly.

Of the 17 research instruments with the highest frequency of usage that Griffiee (2012) pointed out, the survey claims the second-highest rank due to its popularity. This can be inferred that the population is more likely to come across this design more often as they go about their daily activities. Thus, for the ease of collecting data from a moderate sample size, the majority of which were still senior high school students and hence yet to have much exposure as participants in research at the time, along with the fact that the sheer number of sample size was too large to allow for direct observation, its optimal instrument for data collection, the questionnaire, was relied on (Cohen et al., 2000, as cited in Griffiee, 2012; Babbie, 2004, as cited in Griffiee, 2012). In particular, the questionnaire consisted of two descriptive questions in the form of demographics, 12 behavioral questions of frequency for the clarification of which

problems the learners faced the most while engaging in the IELTS Writing Task 2, and 22 questions of preference, 12 of which were the causes for the mentioned problems, 10 of which the suggestions thereof.

### *Data collection & analysis*

The researchers utilized Google Form as the platform upon which the questionnaire was established, owing to its nature of being user-friendly, ease of access, and the way the yielded results are presented (Callegaro et al., 2015). In light of the complications from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the need to hand out the questionnaire directly were redundant and unnecessary, the participants were contacted online via mail and social platforms, e.g., Facebook and Zalo, to contribute. The entire process occurred in May 2021.

The collected data was quantified by comparing the means of the responses. It was decided that the most pressing problems and suggestions would be those with the most reactions, as they were the collective choice of a large and, to some extent, homogeneous population size. Of the two, the former's frequency was measured by allowing the participants to choose between having never come across to always encountering them, whereas the latter's data was collected via a four-point Likert scale, which, according to Croasmun and Ostrom (2011), helped participants be more decisive in their choice. As for the causes, their data would be collected via a series of dichotomous inquiries of "yes" or "no" to the given statements/ items, where a participant was eligible to choose more than one at a time. It should be noted that all the information the participants inputted were kept confidential while they themselves remained anonymous throughout the ordeal as initially assured.

## **Results**

In this section, the collected data were presented and elucidated in great detail, as it provided the basis for the entailing analysis in the succeeding section.

Due to the nature of the sampling procedure, which was convenience sampling as stated above, the 205 participants belonged to different demographic groups in terms of education level and English proficiency, which were reported saliently in the following table.

Table 1 presents the demographics of our sample. It is worth noting that the majority of our participants were undergraduates, who accounted for 73.2%. The level of English proficiency spread throughout the spectrum, with the two ends being elementary and advanced. The largest proportion was at the intermediate level (N=83), followed by upper-intermediate (N=45) and advanced levels (N=33). The two lowest levels, namely elementary and pre-intermediate, took up the smallest proportion of the total participants.

Concerning the frequency of problems the participants confronted in IELTS Writing Task 2, there were 12 in total, each of which received different responses, as shown below.

Table 1.

The Participants' Demographics [size 11]

<b>Education Level</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1. High school	18	8.8%
2. Undergraduate program	150	73.2%
3. Bachelor's degree	23	11.2%
4. Postgraduate program	9	4.4%
5. Master's degree	5	2.4%
6. Doctor of Philosophy	0	0.0%
<b>N</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>English Proficiency</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1. Elementary	17	8.3%
2. Pre-intermediate	27	13.2%
3. Intermediate	83	40.5%
4. Upper-intermediate	45	22.0%
5. Advanced	33	16.0%
<b>N</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 2.

The Participants' Problems Measured in Frequency in IELTS Writing Task 2

<b>Problems</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std.</b>	<b>CV.</b>
	<b>(1)</b>	<b>(2)</b>	<b>(3)</b>	<b>(4)</b>	<b>(5)</b>			
	N	N	N	N	N			
1 Time constraint	4	28	58	90	25	3.51	0.94	0.27
2 Paraphrasing difficulty	9	37	51	74	34	3.42	1.12	0.33
3 Insufficient background knowledge	4	45	64	69	23	3.30	1.06	0.32
4 Failure to link ideas	12	57	59	55	22	3.09	1.23	0.40
5 Confusing sentences	14	58	56	62	15	3.03	1.22	0.40
6 Punctuation and grammatical errors	17	58	60	48	22	3.00	1.28	0.43
7 Misuse of words/phrases	16	59	58	58	14	2.98	1.24	0.42
8 Off-topic	19	69	54	53	10	2.83	1.29	0.46
9 Complex structures	25	60	62	42	16	2.82	1.32	0.47
10 Misspellings	27	67	58	36	17	2.75	1.36	0.49
11 Task misunderstanding	19	82	62	37	5	2.64	1.29	0.49
12 Issues with essay structure	50	65	47	33	10	2.45	1.42	0.58

Among the problems faced by the participants shown in Table 2, according to the mean obtained, the five most frequent ones were time constraint, paraphrasing, insufficient background knowledge, linking ideas, and writing confusing sentences ( $M > 3$ ). The choices' responses for each item were coded as 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, respectively. With regard to the other issues, they tended to have such difficulties on a less frequent basis, with the mean of each less or equal to 3. From the calculated standard of deviation, the coefficient of variation generated was numerically low (all  $CVs < 1$ ), indicating that all the choices in each item attracted responses and that their dispersion was adjacent to the mean.

Owing to the problems aforementioned were the ensuing 12 causes. The data were yielded by asking the 205 participants to check "yes" if such were the causes of their problems and "no" if they were otherwise.

Table 3.

Causes of the Problems in IELTS Writing Task 2

Causes	"Yes" responses	"No" responses	N
1. Influenced by Vietnamese	129	76	205
2. Writing anxiety	126	79	205
3. Lack of English exposure	119	86	205
4. Cultural barrier	102	103	205
5. Unbalanced curriculum	71	134	205
6. Not encouraged to write	62	143	205
7. Negative attitude towards writing	58	147	205
8. Following unverified claims	43	162	205
9. Using inauthentic sources	40	165	205
10. Unqualified teachers	23	182	205
11. Outdated materials	22	183	205
12. Lack of technological facilities	12	193	205

Of the 12 causes, only the first three, which were, respectively, being influenced by Vietnamese (129), writing anxiety (126), and lack of English exposure (119), received more positive remarks than their negative counterpart. The fourth category, cultural barrier, attained mixed responses, with 102 out of 205 participants deeming it a noteworthy cause, which left the remaining 103 convinced otherwise. In contrast, extrinsic-based causes, namely unqualified teachers (182), outdated materials (183), and lack of technological facilities (193), attracted the most negative responses.

Ten suggestions measured for relevance via a four-point Likert scale, which ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," were posed to the participants. The results were shown explicitly as follows.

Table 4.

## Suggestions to Eliminate or Mitigate the Problems in IELTS Writing Task 2

Suggestions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std.	CV.
	N	N	N	N			
1. Adhering to the five steps of read-think-plan-write-check	1	1	32	171	3.82	0.53	0.14
2. Paying more attention to word choice	0	2	54	149	3.72	0.56	0.15
3. Understanding the IELTS band descriptors	1	7	65	132	3.60	0.67	0.19
4. Exchanging feedback with peers	1	6	69	129	3.59	0.78	0.22
5. Not believing in unverified claims	2	27	59	117	3.42	0.94	0.27
6. Reading sample essays	0	16	92	97	3.40	0.81	0.24
7. Collaborative writing	4	36	73	92	3.23	0.97	0.30
8. Making use of available online resources	3	26	100	76	3.21	0.93	0.29
9. Using mind maps	6	32	80	87	3.21	1.03	0.32
10. Avoiding using uncommon words	14	54	78	59	2.89	1.13	0.39

To find out the mean, the four points on the Likert scale were coded as 1, 2, 3, and 4, ordered from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree". Based on the yielded data exhibited in above, the five-step process was on top of the suggestion list ( $M=3.82$ ). Apart from that, careful selection of words, understanding the band descriptors, working with peers, and dismissing false beliefs were among the suggestions with the most agreement reached by the participants. Meanwhile, avoiding the use of uncommon words situated last on the list, being the only item in the questionnaire with a mean of less than three. Similar to the problems, the suggestion items' coefficient of variation stemmed from the standard of deviation was also low (all  $CVs < 0.5$ ), the illustration from which was that the four-point Likert scale drew responses to all of the posed choices, except for the choice "Strongly disagree" for item 2 and 6. Additionally, the majority of the responses were distributed between the "Agree" and "Strongly agree" choices.

## Discussion

As stated prior, this paper aimed to explore the problems which Vietnamese learners faced in terms of IELTS Writing Task 2, together with the associated causes and practical suggestions on how to overcome those issues. By discerning these three dimensions, both teachers and learners of IELTS are able to relate to their own situations, enacting proper measures so that they can put their best efforts in enhancing their writing performance accordingly. Judging from the demographics, it could be illustrated that most Vietnamese learners undertaking the IELTS

courses were at the higher academic and proficiency levels, proving the intense nature of the IELTS examination, particularly the writing test.

Regarding the first question, which was to seek out the most pressing problems Vietnamese learners encountered in IELTS Writing Task 2, from the yielded data in the results, the top five were time constraint, paraphrasing difficulty, insufficient background knowledge, failure to link ideas, and confusing sentences. The first factor mentioned was in line with what Pearson (2018) and Slater (2002) postulated, that test takers' mentality was majorly affected by the limited allotted time, which put a lot of stress on their mental state, hence draining them of the much-needed composure to confront the test. On the cohesion and coherence endeavor as per the IELTS writing band descriptors dictate, what Panahi and Mohammaditabar (2015) found out from their research on Iranian IELTS test takers, was also apparent in their Vietnamese counterparts, which was the linkage between ideas, either main or supporting. This was due to the fact that the cohesive devices were not used correctly, and in some cases, either redundant or lacking. For the task achievement, Vietnamese learners might not have much difficulty with understanding the task, but what comes next was puzzling to them – the sufficient background knowledge to pull the task off, which agreed with the statements from Liu and Deng (2019) and Wilson (2010). For lexical resources, the researchers discovered that Vietnamese learners had no trouble with having a limited vocabulary pool but rather how to employ them meaningfully. The findings were in accordance with Liu and Deng (2019), who argued that no matter how large their lexical resources were, the failure to paraphrase a word or phrase into another alternative served as proof they could not live up to the requirements, thus rendered their band score to the minimal in this regard. In addition, Vietnamese IELTS test takers also abused complex sentence structures simply because they thought they could garner additional score by doing so, which were not the case (Cullen, 2017).

As for the causes for the identified problems, it was found out that the interference of the mother tongue, Vietnamese, anxiety, and the inadequacy of necessary amounts of exposure to English were the three most fundamental agents inducing the problems. These factors were also discovered in the study of Bagheri and Riasati (2016) when they collected data from teachers and learners. It is true that Vietnamese has a profound impact on learners' English writing skills (Vu, 2017), which may explain the problem regarding writing ambiguous sentences. The differences between the two languages are most likely to induce this negative transfer (Hummel, 2014). In addition, the anxiety experienced by Vietnamese learners, which was confirmed as the second most significant cause, was apparent owing to the sophisticated characteristic of writing skill, making itself the most difficult skill to master (Uysal, 2009). Furthermore, learners' lack of mandatory exposure to English was attributed to the fact that most of the participants were undertaking courses in universities and colleges and that they had recourse to IELTS training classes in language centers. This accounted for the shortage of input received by them within limited studying hours, thus impeding the progress of their writing skill. Although perceived as a potential cause by half of the participants, the discrepancy between Vietnamese and English cultures brought about the issues. Since undergraduate students had

developed their Vietnamese writing skills, they found adopting the English writing style overwhelming, which is the cultural block highlighted by Cullen (2017).

For the third research question, five suggestions that aligned objectively with what the Vietnamese learners desired the most were posed, namely the five-step process, paying more attention to word choice, consulting the IELTS writing band descriptors, exchanging feedback with peers, and not believing in unverified claims. Interestingly, the latter three of which fell into the preparation stage, while the first two occurred after and during the writing process, respectively. For the five-step process, it should be noted that learners should comply with the five-step process proposed by Cullen (2017), which entailed reading, thinking, planning, writing, and checking instead of the conventional read, write, check. Regarding word choice, teachers should teach learners, and the latter should also test out situations where certain words or phrases were more preferable than the others before applying them directly in writing (Awwalia & Suhardi, 2020). Similarly, precautions and thorough consultation with the IELTS writing band descriptors were essential, as it helped learners focus on the appropriate path (Ameri-Golestan & Nezakat-Alhossaini, 2013). On feedback, Ganji (2009) dismissed those coming from the teachers, as they were more like lectures in nature. Instead, learners could benefit greatly from giving and receiving feedback from peers as they practiced writing. Last but not least, IELTS Writing Task 2 learners must refrain from confiding in unverified claims on the matter. As they were baseless and unscientific, they could pose uncalled for consequences (Cullen, 2017).

## Conclusion

This study has to some extent, successfully investigated the problems Vietnamese learners experienced, their potential causes, and the suggestions for remedying such. The most acute areas of issues observed were dispersed in three of the four criteria described in the band descriptors, namely TA, CC, and LR. According to the findings from the survey handed to Vietnamese learners enrolling in IELTS courses, the five most pressing problems were time limit, paraphrasing, the lack of background knowledge, incapability to connect ideas, and composing puzzling sentences. Four related causes on which most of the participants agreed were also identified, including the interference of Vietnamese, anxiety, the scarcity of exposure to the English language, and the cultural divergence between the two languages in question. Among the suggestions displayed in the survey, the top five recommendations with which the majority of the participants aligned themselves were the five-step process proposed by Cullen (2017), cautious word selection, apprehending the band descriptors, working cooperatively with peers, and rejecting dubious claims.

Even so, the research, in light of its scope being limited to only the learners who have at some time interacted with the researching team members at two language centers in Ho Chi Minh City, could in no way represent an adequate homogeneous population for all of Vietnamese IELTS Writing Task 2 learners, but rather only a fraction - specifically in the country's southern

metropolis. Furthermore, even though the study managed to point out a series of problems, causes, and suggestions for the learners engaging in the said endeavor, it has not made a tangible link between the presented issues and their sources as well as with the ensuing recommendations. Thus, the research should serve as a foundation for succeeding studies into the notion to base on so that a more complete picture could be realized nationwide.

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## **Biodata**

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## Effects of Using Computer-Based Activities in Teaching English Speaking at a High School in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam


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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** high school, computer-based activities, Computer-Assisted Language Learning, English speaking, communication

It is well-acknowledged that the English language is becoming widespread worldwide, and the application of computer technology in teaching and learning foreign languages in general and English, in particular, has shown significant changes. To improve English speaking skills for high school students, we designed and applied some computer-based activities (CBA) using computer technology. This research aimed to explore the effects of using such CBA in teaching English speaking at a high school in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The study was carried out with a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. A total of 88 high school students were engaged as subjects in the form of experimental and control groups. The experimental group was given a treatment using CBA in their speaking sections for five months. A set of pre-test and post-test was conducted to assess the effectiveness of CBA on this experimental group in comparison with the control one who got no treatment with CBA. In the assessment, we employed the form of PET speaking and this international test's speaking rubric and a student questionnaire which helped to identify the experimental students' attitudes towards CBA. The results showed the positive effects of using CBA on students' speaking skills and significantly improving their communication problems after treatment. In addition, they were quite interested in using CBA, which is a great encouragement to recommend more use of CBA in teaching speaking to students in Vietnam's high schools and similar contexts.

### Introduction

In the past, foreign language learning methods focused on learning grammar rules, describing sentence patterns, memorizing words, and interpreting text sources. However, with the trend of international economic integration, Vietnam has introduced several foreign languages,

especially English, into the curricula at high school. English is also considered the language of international communication. Seidlhofer (2011, p. 20) also emphasizes that English is a unique language that has spread worldwide and describes the use of the English language “as a global means of inter-community communication.” Some researchers (Sundkvist & Nguyen, 2020; Nguyen & Ngo, 2021; Quoc et al., 2021) have previously asserted that English is the most common language used and taught in Vietnam due to transnational trade and tourism and globalization. Thereby, it can be seen that English has become not only an important language of communication in different international communication contexts but also one of the main subjects taught in Vietnam’s high schools.

On the other hand, the development of technology also plays a meaningful role in language learning. Many improvements in form, especially renewing the method of teaching English by applying the achievements of information technology such as the use of computers in education, have become indispensable. Chau (2021) stated that information technology has a positive and effective impact on improving students’ speaking skills. Therefore, introducing computers into language learning has a long and varied history in many countries, and Vietnam is not an exception. It has been known for its various abbreviations, from computer-based training (CBT) to computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Teaching English using the computer as a specifically pedagogical tool help assist the appropriate instruction of English language learners.

Research by Ayres (2002) confirms that learners appreciate that the computer is really relevant in their learning, so CALL will help them have higher learning motivation. According to Muir-Herzig (2004), the impact of the teaching and learning process is the application of technology in the classroom, and it will help teachers foster a constructive classroom environment. Jarvis and Achilleos (2013) also state that CALL is the best way to advance students’ knowledge in second language learning. All indicate that we are using computer-based activities more and more.

Rather than trade and transactions, technology is heavily exploited in the educational sphere. Technology is a communication method. In order to communicate, learners must cultivate their speaking skills while learning English. Therefore, foreign language teaching programs have focused much on communication ability. With advances in multimedia technology, the Industrial Revolution 4.0 has had a significant impact on foreign language teaching and learning, contributing to diversifying and improving the efficiency of transferring foreign language knowledge and skills through the application of achievements of information technology, especially in teaching speaking skills. Teachers may organize exciting and lively CBA to improve learners’ speaking competence. Therefore, it is required that teachers of foreign languages be equipped with the knowledge and the ability to apply information technology in their teaching. Teachers need to have the necessary knowledge in applying computers and handling them to promote the positive effects of computers in teaching (Burns, 2010). In most high schools in Vietnam, English speaking as a communication skill is a genuine hurdle that both teachers and students must overcome. Realizing the importance of communicating in

English, the purpose of this study is to find out the effects of the classroom instructional use of CBA for speaking sections at a high school to help students improve their speaking competence and further improve the effective teaching using advantages of the time of technology 4.0 in Vietnam's English education context at high schools.

Moreover, global high school systems are aiming to "integrating technology" into teaching. Foreign language learning is expanding the use of technology by CALL to teach a second language (L2) related to speaking competence which is one of the elementary worries of language teachers. The appearance of technology has revolutionized language usage. In order to develop speaking abilities in classrooms, a variety of novel technologies are being demonstrated. CBA is well-used and contributes to the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking with foreign language teachers and students from around the world. With the development of the Internet, the computer has been changed from a search tool and turned information into a useful and informative tool. The simultaneous global communication supported by the Internet has transformed the way teachers and students teach and learn a foreign language. In spite of the fact that technology cannot replace a teacher's critical function, it can be utilized to improve classroom teaching approaches. The Internet, podcasts, video conferencing, voice and video recognition software, TELL, and blogs are compared as the best tools for imparting communication skills. Besides, additional solutions such as linguistics laboratories or tape-based self-study, the integration of audio, voice interaction, text, video, and animation have replaced the methods, which have enabled teachers to create a lively learning environment and enhance the model of language learning in the classroom.

### *Definition of key terms*

*Computer:* According to the views of two educators, Warschauer and Healey (1998), computers could help meet the needs and challenges of students' learning practice thanks to a variety of computer-based activities. In this study, the computer is a tool to design CBA in teaching English speaking. Students use computers to connect to the Internet and social networking sites such as Facebook, Skype, Line, Twitter, Viber, WhatsApp, etc. to practice speaking English. Fouz-González (2017) asserted that Twitter helps students improve pronunciation.

*Computer-based activity:* In this study, most activities were designed and framed by the curriculum so that the teacher could influence actual computer use in education. A computer-aided learning environment would provide learners with an authentic learning environment that helped learners learn English better than in everyday classroom settings. In an article by Chirimbu and Tafazoli (2013), they affirmed that the process of language teaching and learning in a technology-based English classroom brought many valuable interactive opportunities for learners than in classrooms with traditional language learning.

Alkash and Al-Dersi (2017) stated that PowerPoint presentation provides users with tools to create interactive lessons, especially helping teachers and students in teaching and learning in a dynamic environment, etc. Using PowerPoint software to insert different audio, visual and audio-visual features into speaking lessons will help students easily grasp lesson information

and achieve effective high interactive results, improving students' English speaking skills (Alkash, & Al-Dersi, 2017).

## Literature review

### *Speaking competence*

Brown and Yule (1983, p.14) defined “Speaking is to express the needs - request, information, service, etc.” In Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, Hornby (2000, p. 1063), speaking is described as to talk or say something about something. In addition, Jones (2001, p. 155) stated, "Speaking is a form of communication". These definitions show that people spend of their everyday life in speaking to each other as communicating with each other. Online Merriam Webster’s Dictionary (2004) defined speaking competence as the knowledge that enables a person to communicate and understand a language.

Savignon (1991, p. 267) emphasized in communication competence, understanding the socio-cultural contexts of language use is essential for speaking skills. Similarly, according to Bachman and Palmer (1996, p. 371), one’s speaking competence of a language is manifested by his/her linguistic competence, knowledge of encountering linguistic communication challenges, as well as linguistically emotional reactions. Additionally, Tran (2021) defined a person considered a proficient communicator when speaking competence is proficient.

In an article by Nunan (1999), the ability to speak a language is the ability to master enough vocabulary and structure to talk about some issue. Ginkel, Gulikers, Biemans, and Mulder (2015) stated that mastery of speaking via presentation is recognized as a fundamental ability of well-educated students. Afrizal (2015) emphasized by interacting through speaking activities in the information gap, the students feel comfortable communicating to create and receive information to improve their speaking competence in class. Also, Uchihara and Saito (2016) affirmed there is a close relationship between vocabulary and speaking skills because effective vocabulary usage shows the level of fluency of language learners.

In this research, the term “speaking competence” refers to a student who is able to speak coherently and with understanding other speakers and what they are saying about any given topic. It means that a student can speak English to others, so he/ she can achieve a certain degree of spoken interaction and spoken production. In reality, one's speaking competence depends on what context he/she is speaking in, e.g., a talk, a friendly conversation, or a presentation. As a result, it is the teacher who should create relevant activities and provide his/her students with as many chances as possible to improve their speaking skills in class. Murphy (1991) confirmed that language teachers should integrate speaking and listening and pronunciation teaching; reading and writing activities should be used as follow-up activities to encourage speaking competence. Oradee (2012) delined some communicative activities in language learning, such as discussion and role-play, play a crucial role in increasing students' English speaking skills.



### *Assessment criteria for speaking competence*

In this research, to measure the improvement of the student participants' speaking skills, the researcher applies the speaking performance assessment and the levels in Spoken Interaction and Spoken Production by Council of Europe (2018) as required in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It is a framework currently employed to measure students' English competence at high schools and universities in Vietnam. Here we focus on level B1, equal to PET for high school students at grade 10 in Vietnam as a set of assessment standards for their speaking competence.

**Table 1.** Assessing Speaking Performance – Level B (UCLES 2019, p.2)

B1	Grammar and Vocabulary	Discourse Management	Pronunciation	Interactive Communication
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms, and attempts some complex grammatical forms.</li> <li>Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary to give and exchange views on familiar topics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produces extended stretches of language despite some hesitation.</li> <li>Contributions are relevant despite some repetition.</li> <li>Uses a range of cohesive devices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is intelligible.</li> <li>Intonation is generally appropriate.</li> <li>Sentence and word stress is generally accurately placed.</li> <li>Individual sounds are generally articulated clearly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiates and responds appropriately.</li> <li>Maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome with very little support.</li> </ul>
4	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.</i>			
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms.</li> <li>Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary when talking about familiar topics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produces responses which are extended beyond short phrases, despite hesitation.</li> <li>Contributions are mostly relevant, but there may be some repetition.</li> <li>Uses basic cohesive devices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is mostly intelligible, and has some control of phonological features at both utterance and word levels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiates and responds appropriately.</li> <li>Keeps the interaction going with very little prompting and support.</li> </ul>
2	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.</i>			
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shows sufficient control of simple grammatical forms.</li> <li>Uses a limited range of appropriate vocabulary to talk about familiar topics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produces responses which are characterised by short phrases and frequent hesitation.</li> <li>Repeats information or digresses from the topic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is mostly intelligible, despite limited control of phonological features.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintains simple exchanges, despite some difficulty.</li> <li>Requires prompting and support.</li> </ul>
0	<i>Performance below Band 1.</i>			

*Source: <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/cefr/>*

The B1 scales are divided into six bands from 0 to 5, with 0 being the lowest and 5 the highest. Descriptors for each criterion indicate what a candidate is expected to demonstrate at each band. Usually, students who achieve band 3 and above generally get at least B1 level. Thanks to such detailed descriptors, teachers can observe how students carry out their speaking tasks, note down examples of performance related to the listed criteria, give students feedback on their strengths and weaknesses, and evaluate whether students are able to achieve level B1 and how they could improve.

In high schools, teaching English speaking is directing students to band 3 and above. Therefore, all speaking activities should be designed to help students meet these criteria. The teacher constantly explores and creates many learning activities to create a learning and fun space to encourage students to interact efficiently, sharpen communication skills, and feel comfortable and excited about learning. Thus, the use of the computer with various photo and video activities relevant to what students are learning help the teacher enable to make his/ her English-speaking classes more vivid as well as get them familiar with the B1 speaking tasks, most of which use pictures, photographs or other visuals as a stimulus for interaction.

### *Computer-assisted language learning in classrooms*

Many scholars, consisting of Levy (1977, p. 1), affirmed that computer-assisted language learning is widely described as exploring and investigating applications of the computer in teaching and learning a language. CALL has a positive impact on student achievement. As a result, the computer plays an important role in active learning and advanced thinking. Warschauer and Kern (2000) agreed that the computer is a great support tool that benefits teaching and learning when it is used in a context with a specific purpose. Pearcey and Elliott (2004) argued that an essential key role to continuous learning is creating a supportive environment for students and opportunities for students to engage in activities. This means the computer-based learning environment is quite helpful.

Also, Bai (2009) indicated that the attitude of university students in China towards CALL is quite positive in their learning English as a foreign language. Similarly, Genç and Aydin (2011) emphasized that students are more motivated, creative and improve their academic performance if taught in a computer-based environment. Prince (2017) suggested that integrating technology into the English language classroom increases student engagement as well as cognitive and learning development. Therefore, the use of CALL in classrooms is of great importance and a certain trend in language teaching in the world, and Vietnam is not an exception.

### *Computer-based activities*

In a classroom with computer-based activities, the learning environment is primarily student-centered rather than a teacher-centered model, and learning is highly interactive, then the student engagement increases. As Haitao (2011), pointed out the importance of a student-centered model in a computer-based English teaching classroom.

Many researchers indicate that students have a stronger motivation to learn English in a computer-based learning environment than in a learning environment without a computer (Arkin, 2003; Marco, 2002; Uzunboylu, 2004). Students improved their learning motivation and increased their willingness to study language studies when learning with computers. According to Little (2007), many researchers have highly appreciated creating an atmosphere in which student autonomy and self-determination principles are consistent with the CALL context (Blin, 2004; O'Dowd, 2007; Schwienhorst 2008; Guillén, 2014). They all agreed that the nexus between technology and the use of language in the modern world would change thinking about how computer-based technology is changing the teaching of English. To increase learners' communicative competence, the learners need to practice using English frequently in the classroom, particularly in an English language class with the help of the computer with a very vibrant and bustling learning atmosphere. When the activities are designed very vividly and attractively, students actively participate in learning. This is the reason why technology is quite relevant to changes in English language teaching, and computer-based activities are not strange for English language teachers. The fact that the presence of the computer and the interaction with it require students to use English, meaning that the English they use is somehow shaped or influenced by the computer technology. Thus, this study would consider and focus

on the language demands for proficient use of English in a computer-assisted classroom to design activities for the speaking class.

### *Common computer-based activities in teaching English speaking*

Below is a summary of some common CBA that has been designed based on the common IT on the computer and their benefits in an English-speaking class.

<b>Order</b>	<b>Kinds of computer-based activities</b>	<b>Importance of CALL/ Benefits</b>
1.	PowerPoint/ ActivInspire (with inserting video clips, animations, sounds, a lesson with colorful text).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Help the instructor save time writing on a chalkboard (Alkash, &amp; Al-Dersi, 2017).</li> <li>- Attract and maintain learners' attention (Alkash, &amp; Al-Dersi, 2017).</li> <li>- Help learners see and interact well with the lesson (Alkash, &amp; Al-Dersi, 2017).</li> <li>- Improve presentation skills (Alkash, &amp; Al-Dersi, 2017).</li> </ul>
2.	Internet software (with many English study programs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Help learners have the opportunity to successfully use English through online software on the Internet such as Google to search for suitable learning materials (Parveen, 2016).</li> <li>- Help students actively participate in Internet-based learning activities and be motivated to practice English in language classrooms (Chairat, 2018).</li> </ul>
3.	Google translation tool, online dictionaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Help learners increase their vocabulary and reading comprehension (Hulstijn, Holander, &amp; Greidanus, 1996; Luppescu &amp; Day, 1993).</li> <li>- Be free, quickly accessible, and easy to use (Ngoc, 2017).</li> <li>- Help students discern the semantics of words and ensure a reliable translation (Medvedev, 2016).</li> </ul>
4.	Speech teaching software such as HelloTalk, Cake, Duolingo, SpeakingPal, Enjoy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Help students pronounce clearly (O'Brien, 2006).</li> </ul>
5.	Communication lab	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Help students to develop four skills (Parveen, 2016).</li> <li>- Create interest in learning for students through headphones in the laboratory (Parveen, 2016; Kuning, 2019).</li> </ul>
6.	Video conferencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Give students a chance to communicate directly with many famous people in the world (Parveen, 2016; Kuning, 2019).</li> <li>- Expand more knowledge in many different fields (Parveen, 2016).</li> </ul>
7.	Speech recognition software	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Be capable of automatic assessment of pronunciation quality Neumeyer, Franco, Digalakis, and Weintraub, 2000).</li> <li>- Help students to find the pronunciation errors to improve their speaking (Kuning, 2019).</li> <li>- Promote students to practice many times until they are proficient and fluent as desired (Parveen, 2016).</li> </ul>

Obviously, various CBA can be designed and applied for language classes. Many researchers, as mentioned above, affirm how effective use of the computer could change the nature of classroom teaching and learning.

### *Research questions*

This study aims at exploring the effects of using CBA in teaching English speaking at a high school in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, and the following research questions are addressed:

1. What are the effects of using CBA in teaching English speaking at a high school?
2. What are the students' attitudes towards the use of CBA in learning English speaking at this high school?

## **Methods**

### *Research design*

This research is an experimental study conducted in a High School, Ho Chi Minh City. The researcher intended to conduct this study at work, right at the beginning of the school year after being assigned to teach two 10<sup>th</sup> graders, the researcher chose one of these two 10<sup>th</sup> graders to conduct the CBA application and use the computer to design English teaching activities speaking at school. Until the second semester, the researcher officially started the research.

In this study, quantitative research collected the score data from the pre-speaking and post-speaking test and the results of a student survey questionnaire to explore the effects of using CBA in teaching English speaking at a High School. The two speaking tests and a questionnaire were analyzed using statistical analysis software SPSS, an essential and reliable tool for the researcher to evaluate the improvement of learners' speaking skills accurately. According to Muijs (2004), empirical research aims to be carried out to prove a known factor to test the validity of a hypothesis.

Moreover, a survey questionnaire design was used to measure the students' attitudes towards the use of CBA in learning English speaking at a High School with statistical precision.

Muijs (2004) distinguishes that the experimental design comprises two main groups: the control and experimental groups. The subjects participating in the experimental group will receive the experimental treatment, and the control group will not. Therefore, based on the results of the pre-speaking test, the researcher divided the 10<sup>th</sup> graders into two study groups: the experimental group (Green Class) and the control group (Yellow Class).

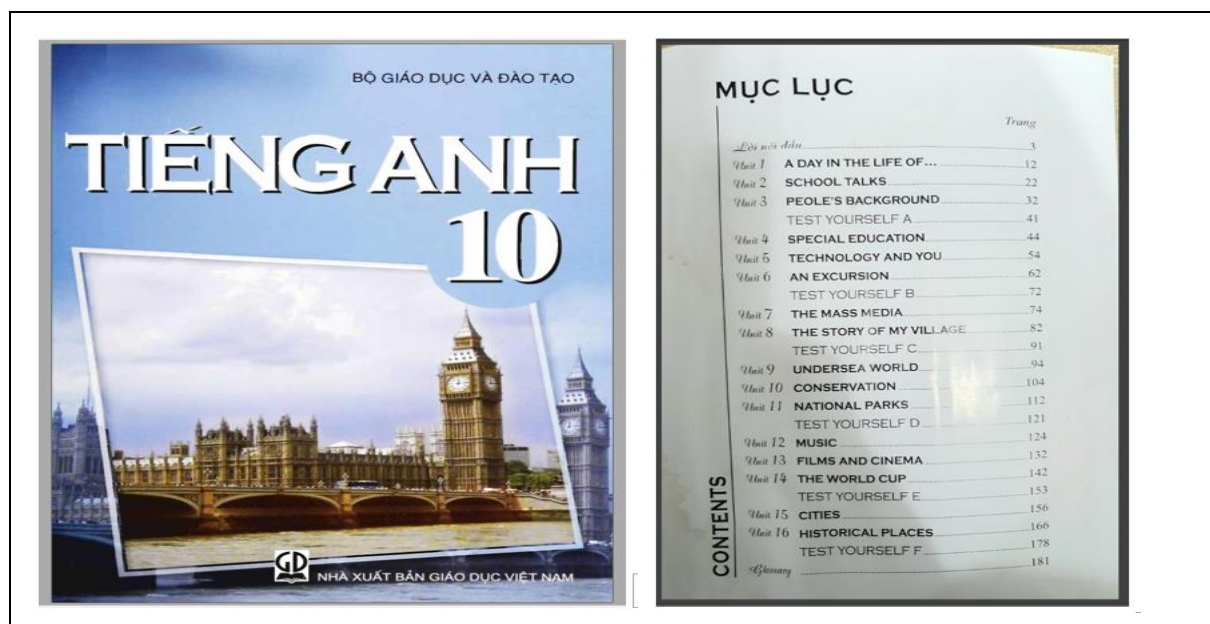
### *Sample and sampling procedures*

The subjects of the study were 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students at a high school in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The participants were chosen because they have learned English for many years, and they all studied with the same Vietnamese and foreign teachers in both classes Yellow Class and Green Class. They were chosen by convenient sampling. After, the 88 students of two

English classes attended a speaking test assessed by a native teacher, using the criteria for PET speaking test as mentioned above. The score results were collected, and then one of the two 10<sup>th</sup> grade classes - Green Class - was randomly selected for treatment with CBA.

The 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students had just moved from their secondary schools to this high school and were eager to discover new styles of learning. They are still in a stage of self-consciousness and are able to concentrate on one activity for more extended periods than previously in their secondary schools but still need interaction and variety. They are typical representatives of generation Z who are in favor of new technologies. Significantly, they prefer to reason and consider diverse points of view. Thus, exploring their adaption and attitudes towards using CBA in their classrooms is quite advantageous. And the research findings are expected to be useful for those who want to find out fresh ideas and gain more experience in using CBA to improve students' English speaking at high schools in Vietnam.

The researcher used the English Textbook 10 by the Vietnamese Education publisher, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, which consists of 16 units. Each unit has five parts, including reading comprehension, speaking, listening, writing, and language focus. In addition, each semester has eight units and eight different speaking topics. In the second semester, the 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students learn units 9-16. The CBA applied in accordance with the speaking theme for the eight units were designed and presented fully. Each lesson lasts 45 minutes and starts at the beginning of the second semester.



During the five months of the experiment, the two groups of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students were taught by the same instructor, i.e., the researcher, but with different treatments. The experimental group, i.e., Green Class, would be instructed and practiced improving their speaking competence by using CBA, while the control group, i.e., Yellow Class, received no instructions on using CBA. For the teaching procedure of the experimental group, there were all eight lessons in the

textbook which were applied CBA to enhance the students' English speaking skills in the second semester. For each lesson with a specific speaking topic, the instructor used a computer for designing and applying one of the six common CBA types as mentioned in the Literature review.

Their positive attitudes can be found in Figure 1 below, in which students were quite excited in CBA in their class with the good classroom atmosphere and effective group presentations.

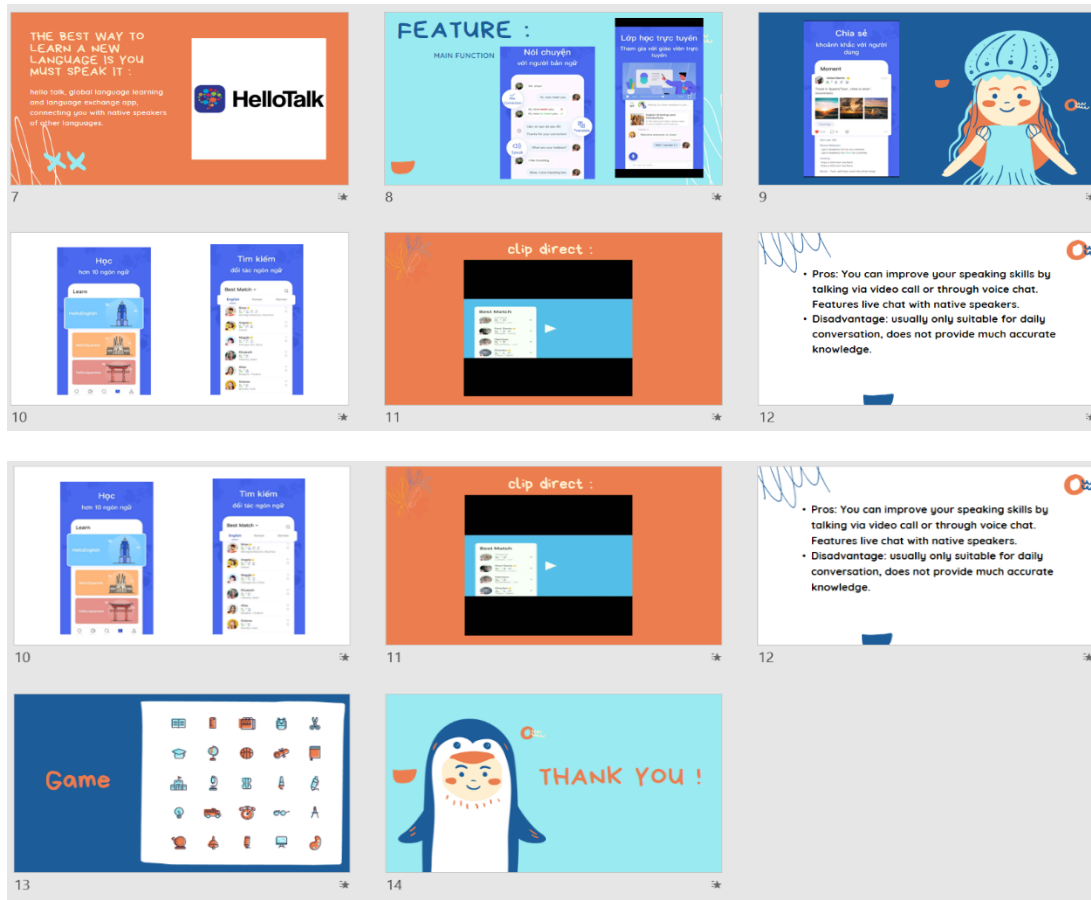


Figure 1. Group 1's presentation in Green Class in which they designed some games and applied the speaking technology software called HelloTalk to practice speaking

### Research instruments

In this study, the researcher would apply a pre-speaking test and post-speaking test, a questionnaire as research instruments. In the post-speaking test, the participants were asked the same questions as the pre-test and covered some new topics such as food, special holidays, the environment, movies. The speaking test lasted for 150 minutes. Also, the researcher used mobile phones to record students' presentations and used a PET speaking rubric to assess the results of the students' improvement in communication.

### (1) Pre-speaking test and post-speaking test

The pre-test was conducted with two 10<sup>th</sup> grade classes, consisting of simple questions posed by a native teacher (self-introduction, hobbies, daily routines, etc.), using common topics as suggested in PET speaking tests. Then the native teacher graded and sent the score list back to the instructor to store as data for the research. However, instead of the scales of 6 bands by CEFR, we modified these 6 scales into 10 as required in Vietnam's scoring education system. That means 0-1 (band 0), 2-3 (band 1), 3-4 (band 2), 5-6 (band 3), 7-8 (band 4), 9-10 (band 5).

After the experiment, the post-test was given to see how the test results of the two groups improved. And the particular purpose was to see whether the scores of the experimental group in the post-speaking test compared to the pre-speaking test have enhanced or not.

Moreover, the post-test was conducted to confirm and evaluate the effectiveness of using CBA and measure the learners' improvement in English speaking. While the native teacher was testing the students' post-speaking test, the researcher recorded the students' speaking tests. After getting the scores of the post-test from the native teacher, the researcher used PET speaking rubric to assess more their speaking performance. In the post-speaking test, the participants were asked the same questions as the pre-test and covered some new topics such as food, special holidays, the environment, movies so that the teacher could measure their improvement if any. Both speaking tests are scored by the same native teacher. The researcher only collected the results and conducted a comparison of the students' progress in speaking ability in the two groups.

### (2) Student questionnaire

The questionnaire was delivered to the experimental group to collect their perspectives and answers after treatment in this current study. It aimed to investigate their feelings about their computer use and attitudes towards the advantages of using computer-based activities in support of their teacher's teaching English speaking.

The survey questionnaire is on a 6-point Likert scale. It was used to measure the experimental group's opinions about CBA, and the scale was given and ranked in order from 1 lowest point to 6 highest score; and the survey was conducted in 45 minutes. In detail, the scale of possible responses to the question - ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) through 3 (neither disagree nor agree) to 6 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was developed from Stepp-Greany (2002) and Rahimi (2011). In respect to its structure, the questionnaire covered twenty-two statements divided into two groups: (1) the effects of using computer-based activities in teaching English speaking (from questions 1 to 14) and (2) students' attitudes towards their teacher's instruction with CBA in an English-speaking section (from questions 15 to 22). These statements elicited information about the students' effectiveness as well as attitudes towards learning English Speaking through CBA.

### *Data collection procedures*

The data collection was done from January to May 2021, including four steps as follows.

Step 1: The score data was collected via a pre-speaking test assessed by a native teacher. A pre-test was a procedure to show the initial score results of the Yellow Class and Green Class students before applying CBA in class. All the students' answers were recorded for later use. The implementation start date was in January 2021, when students began the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester. After that, the researcher saved the score results for comparison after the course finished.

Step 2: Green Class with 43 students was selected as the experimental group for computer-based instruction through eight units, using CBA to enhance the students' English-speaking competence; and the students in Yellow Class served as the control group, learning without any CBA treatment. CBA was used in various forms for the experimental group for each unit in the second semester.

Step 3: At the end of the course and before the students took the 2<sup>nd</sup>-semester exam in May 2021, the same native teacher was invited to give the experimental group and the control group a post-speaking test to collect the score data and compare if there were any differences between pre-test and post-test. The students' answers were also recorded for further analysis.

Step 4: The experimental group was invited to participate in a questionnaire survey written both in English and Vietnamese about the CBA designed for their treatment. It was conducted for 45 minutes. At the beginning of the survey, the participants were thoroughly explained about the objective of the questionnaire and its items so that they could understand clearly and with full collaboration. Then the collected data was analyzed by using SPSS software.

The questionnaire was developed from those used in some previous researches, including Stepp-Greany, 2002; Rahimi, 2011; and Pham Ngoc Truong Linh, 2017.

The reliability of the data refers to the accuracy or truthfulness of measurement of the results for the current study. In terms of the questionnaire-based survey, since the questionnaire is based on some items that many researchers used in their studies have used (some content has also been adapted to the current study), a certain degree of validity (both structural and content validity) can be assumed immediately from the beginning.

## **Results and discussions**

*Research question 1: What are the effects of using CBA in teaching English speaking to grade 10<sup>th</sup> students at Binh Hung Hoa High School?*

### **(1) Results and discussions from the pre-speaking test and post-test speaking**

The comparison of the score results of the pre-speaking test and post-speaking test of the experimental and control groups is presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

For the pre-test, it can be seen that the students earned the highest pre-test score of 8 points



and the lowest of 3 points. These results show that students still had limited English speaking competence in both groups. The percentage of students with an average score from 6 in the experimental group was about 50%, while that of the control group was about 80%.

However, there is a really positive change in the score of the post-test. The results in Table 3 indicate that the experimental group students achieved the highest speaking score of 10 points and the lowest of 6 points. No student scores were below average as before. Students have greatly improved their English-speaking competence. For the control group, the highest score achieved by the student was 9, and no 10 was found. The percentage of the students with an average score from 6 in the control group was nearly 85% in comparison with 80% of the pre-test. It means there is not much change in this group.

Table 2. The pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group

Pre-test (Experimental group)					Post-test (Experimental group)				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	1	2.3	2.3	Valid	6	2	4.7	4.7
	4	2	4.7	7.0		7	11	25.6	30.2
	5	18	41.9	48.8		8	16	37.2	67.4
	6	14	32.6	81.4		9	11	25.6	93.0
	7	6	14.0	95.3		10	3	7.0	100.0
	8	2	4.7	100.0	Total	43	100.0	100.0	
Total	43	100.0	100.0						

Table 3. The pre-test and post-test scores of the control group

Pre-test (Control group)					Post-test (Control group)				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	1	2.2	2.2	Valid	4	2	4.4	4.4
	4	1	2.2	4.4		5	4	8.9	13.3
	5	8	17.8	22.2		6	14	31.1	44.4
	6	19	42.2	64.4		7	15	33.3	77.8
	7	9	20.0	84.4		8	8	17.8	95.6
	8	7	15.6	100.0		9	2	4.4	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0		Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Besides, the focus of this study is a mainly in-depth analysis of the experimental group’s results through pre-test and post-test to demonstrate that the use of CBA is effective in the English-

speaking classroom. Thus, the results of the speaking test of the control group served as a stepping stone for the analysis of the experimental group. At the same time, it is a prerequisite for developing a more effective experimental group.

The findings above are quite similar to those in the study of AL-Garni and Almuhammadi (2019). These researchers succeeded in testing the effect of using communicative language activities on the speaking skills of EFL students at the University of Jeddah by comparing the score results of the experimental and control groups. Research results also showed that the scores of the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group were higher than those of the control group, especially shown clearly by the difference between the median values. Using SPSS software, the study showed that the median of the total scores of the post-test increased by 1.500 compared to the pre-test in the experimental group, which proved that the students had enhanced their speaking skills. Besides, the scores of the pre-test and post-test of the control group did not change after the experiment. The median of the total scores remained the same as the original 3.0.

Based on the recording of the speaking test of the post-test and the score results, the researcher used the PET speaking rubric as mentioned in the Literature Review to analyze the improvement in English speaking of the student participants. The results showed that the students in the experimental group knew more vocabulary, understood the topic content, provided good main ideas to answer the examiner's questions, and performed their speaking with more fluency. In detail, the students could arrange sentences in appropriate grammatical orders, and they found it easy to understand the examiner and communicate effectively; they were able to listen and grasp the preliminary information and then responded with good interaction; their pronunciation was more precise, more confident with intonation better than before; and they could use words and phrases flexibly in short conversations. The scores are strong evidence for their improvement of communication performance in the post-test in respect to all the four assessment criteria of the PET speaking test.

*(2) Results and discussions from the student questionnaire*

Questions 1 to 14 in the questionnaire are for further discovering the effects of CBA in teaching English speaking.

*Table 4. The effects of CBA in the students' English-speaking performance*

<b>Opinions about CBA</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly disagree</b>	<b>Slightly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
1- I find that the instructions of CBA are easy to understand.	2,3%	4,7%	2,3%	7%	11,6%	72,1%
2- I find that CBA are easy to take part in.	2,3%	7%	2,3%	7%	25,6%	55,8%
3- I think that CBA require students to interact with each other to practice speaking.	7%	4,7%	4,7%	2,3%	13,9%	67,4%
4- I understand the content conveyed in CBA for speaking practice in the class.	7%	2,3%	4,7%	9,3%	37,2%	39,5%
5- I can confidently communicate and speak more fluently thanks to CBA.	2,3%	2,3%	2,3%	7%	44,2%	41,9%
6- There are many effective CBA (Google translation, HelloTalk, Cake, Duolingo, SpeakingPal) in learning English speaking. - I think that CBA help me speak English better.	0%	0%	0%	4,7%	9,3%	86%
7- My language learning is improved when I learn with CBA.	0%	2,3%	4,7%	7%	46,5%	39,5%
8- I think that the contents from CBA are helpful for my self-study.	0%	2,3%	2,3%	4,7%	9,3%	81,4%
9- I find that CBA help me interact more with my teacher. - I find that CBA help me interact more with my friends.	0%	2,3%	4,7%	0%	27,9%	65,1%
10- I find that my speaking skills in English improved as a result of the CBA.	0%	2,3%	4,7%	2,3%	20,9%	69,8%
11- I gain more confidence in English language activities after using CBA.	2,3%	2,3%	4,7%	2,3%	37,2%	51,2%
12- I think that CBA help students to improve their knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, and so on.	2,3%	7%	4,7%	4,7%	32,5%	48,8%
13- There are some effective speech teaching software such as HelloTalk, Cake, Duolingo, SpeakingPal, Enjoy, etc. - The tasks I perform using CBA are interesting (such as Cake, SpeakingPal Software, etc.).	0%	0%	2,3%	4,7%	20,9%	72,1%
14- I learn many things from the interactive CBA.	0%	2,3%	4,7%	7%	34,8%	51,2%
<b>Count: 43 students</b>						

The statistical results reveal that most of the students agreed on the positive impacts of CBA on their learning. Over 75% to 90% thought that CBA was beneficial and helped create more interaction in the learning process; the students learned a lot from CBA and made significant

progress in their communication. In items 6 and 13, nearly 100% of the students enjoyed learning speaking with all the CBA designed for their speaking class because these CBA helped enhance their speaking competence. For the other items, over 85%-90% believed that using CBA in English speaking class would help them improve their knowledge of vocabulary and pronunciation and gain more confidence in communication. It means the use of CBA is quite effective in enhancing all the aspects of speaking performance, including grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation and interactive communication.

*Research question 2: What are the students' attitudes towards the use of CBA in learning English speaking at this high school?*

*Table 4. The students' attitudes towards the use of CBA in their English-speaking class*

<b>Opinions about CBA</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly disagree</b>	<b>Slightly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
15- I like the learning environment using CBA.	0%	0%	4,7%	9,3%	23,2%	62,8%
16- I prefer learning English speaking through CBA than learning English speaking with traditional classroom activities.	0%	2,3%	2,3%	7%	9,3%	79,1%
17- I prefer the flexibility of being able to do all CBA in the classroom.	0%	2,3%	4,7%	9,3%	30,2%	53,5%
18- I enjoy interacting with others to enhance speaking skills thanks to CBA.	2,3%	0%	4,7%	9,3%	18,6%	65,1%
19- It is very effective to use CBA to design and organize pictures and videos in an English language classroom. - I like the pictures and videos enclosed in CBA.	0%	0%	0%	7%	2,3%	90,7%
20- I put more time into CBA practice speaking in a regular English class.	0%	2,3%	2,3%	7%	25,6%	62,8%
21- I think that CBA should be included in English lessons.	2,3%	2,3%	2,3%	4,7%	27,9%	60,5%
22- I like using online dictionaries to find information about word sounds and practice speaking.	0%	0%	0%	4,7%	25,6%	69,7%

Items 15-22 show that the whole experimental group expressed a positive attitude towards the effective use of CBA in teaching English speaking skills. According to the results of the survey, the percentage of students agreeing is very high, accounting for about 85% or over. The results prove that the application of CBA in the classroom for the students at this high school is very reasonable and meets their communication needs. In-depth, 100% of students like learning to speak English through CBA using pictures, videos, and online dictionaries. About 85% expected the classroom environment with the use of CBA because they have more interaction and more practice than in the traditional classroom one. And over 80% supported and preferred the use of CBA in their speaking class.

**The students' attitudes towards the use of CBA in their English speaking sections**

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I like the learning environment using CBA.	43	234.00	5.4419	.85363
I prefer learning English speaking through CBA than learning English speaking with traditional classroom activities.	43	241.00	5.6047	.90342
I prefer the flexibility of being able to do all CBA in the classroom.	43	227.00	5.2791	.98381
I enjoy interacting with others to enhance speaking skills thanks to CBA.	43	231.00	5.3721	1.09160
I like the pictures and videos enclosed in CBA.	43	251.00	5.8372	.53141
I put more time into CBA practice speaking in a regular English class with traditional activities.	43	234.00	5.4419	.90770
I think that CBA should be included in English lessons.	43	230.00	5.3488	1.11021
I like using online dictionaries to find information about word sounds and practice speaking.	43	243.00	5.6512	.57253
Valid N (listwise)	43			

*Figure 3. Mean and standard deviation of the student's attitudes towards the use of CBA in their English speaking sections*

The above descriptive statistics table details the mean values of 8 items related to the students' attitudes towards their teacher's using CBA in teaching English speaking. From the survey results of this questionnaire, the researcher can analyze the data to get the mean value above 5.2. From that, it is concluded that students have a positive attitude and highly appreciate the application of CBA to support students in speaking practice.

In Jin and Deifell' research (2013), the use and awareness of learners for online dictionaries shows the importance of online dictionaries in language courses. Online dictionaries help learners access and learn the meanings and forms of words and the pronunciation of words in listening and speaking tasks. In addition, the research findings pointed out that the use of online dictionaries such as Google Search and Google Translate did assist students' learning. This research's findings indicated clear resonance with previous studies because my findings show that the students really enjoyed learning English speaking through CBA with online dictionaries, Google Search, and Google Translate. These tools help students improve their pronunciation skills, leading to a positive learning attitude of students.

Through the questionnaire survey in this research, the students expressed their positive attitude towards the effective use of CBA in teaching and learning English speaking.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The present study's primary purpose is to explore the effects of using computer-based activities in teaching English speaking at a high school in Vietnam. At the same time, the study investigates the students' attitudes towards learning English speaking through CBA. To see the effectiveness of CBA, the researcher conducted three steps to collect the data and get the results: pre-test scores, post-test scores, and a survey questionnaire.

After five the experiment, the detailed results of scores of the pre-speaking and post-speaking tests show that students in the experimental group have excellent improvements in speaking competence. All of the students in Green Class (experimental group) got higher scores in the post-speaking test than in the pre-speaking test while in Yellow Class (control group), there was little change. Besides, in the control group, some students had an increase in scores, and some had a decrease in scores compared to baseline. The researchers relied on the PET speaking criteria to assess the students' level of English-speaking improvement. These findings support the effectiveness of using CBA in teaching English speaking to high school students.

In the present study, the researcher found that, in general, there is still a specific limit. The current study only focuses on exploring the effects of using CBA to better high school students' English speaking through applying CBA that are designed with the best information technology applications used on the computer for 10<sup>th</sup> grade students, not all types of high school students. Therefore, its findings may not apply to larger contexts. However, the research results have exposed some certain values: Theoretically, the research inevitably contributes a part to the existing knowledge of successful English-speaking teaching through the design and application of computer-based activities. Furthermore, it is expected that the study's findings would be a source of reference for teachers to find better and effective methods for their classroom language teaching in similar contexts and might be a suggestion to further research related to the use of CBA in teaching English in general and English speaking in particular; Practically, the findings of this study would be beneficial for the teachers and learners at the high school where the research was conducted because the teachers might raise their awareness about the effects of using computer-aided learning in teaching English speaking to improve the speaking competence of students. Moreover, the teachers at this high school could find better and effective methods for their classroom language teaching, i.e., the findings would be helpful for teachers who might find difficulties and depression in making a decision about what ways to design and apply CBA used for improving their students' speaking competence. More importantly, using CBA could be employed as an effective and positive method for learners to improve their language skills, especially speaking.

Although teachers using computers are highly effective in creating English-speaking teaching activities, computer technology cannot successfully replace humans, so they may be challenged by those able to apply technology. However, hopefully, this present study may serve as a helpful reference for teachers to find better and more effective methods for language teaching in their classrooms in similar contexts in different high schools in Ho Chi Minh City.

## Acknowledgments

It can be seen that, when teachers use CBA in their speaking classes, students have many opportunities to participate in the conversation, individual practice, pairs, groups, and presentations. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that teachers and students in Vietnam's high schools should take technology advantages into their teaching and learning. By creating different computer-based activities in the classroom, using sounds and images in lectures, those who use the computer to teach and learn with vivid visualizations would gain improvement in their performance.

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### **Biodata**

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## Readiness for Online Learning: Learners' Comfort and Self-Directed Learning Ability

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** Online learning, readiness, comfort, self-directed learning

The need for transforming conventional learning to online learning among educational institutions during the coronavirus outbreak is inevitable. However, this shift comes with many challenges for both learners and teachers as they have become habitual to the traditional method for such a long time. Research has shown that students' online learning readiness (OLR) is considered a valid predictor for accomplishing online coursework successfully. Therefore, this paper presents the findings of an examination on students' readiness for online learning in a private university in the South of Vietnam. A self-evaluation OLR survey with a 4-Likert scale was distributed to 304 undergraduate students. The questionnaire highlighted two dimensions: learners' comfort with e-learning and self-directed online learning. Responses were coded and analyzed by SPSS to calculate the descriptive statistics and reliability. Data analysis revealed that these students' readiness level was only at a moderate level, which may account for their resistance to embrace virtual learning as an alternative for a classroom-based environment amidst the disease crisis. Considering the results of the study, some pedagogical implications are also discussed.

### Introduction

During the severe explosion of COVID-19, online learning has become the only alternative that academic institutions must adopt as a mode of teaching and learning with no exception in the Vietnamese context (e.g, Le, 2021). Indeed, online learning has served as a panacea at the time of this outbreak (Dhawan, 2020). However, shifting classroom-based learning to virtual learning confronts many challenges and requires a high level of readiness. This is partly because of the resistance to change of both learners and teachers who have become habitual to the traditional method of teaching and learning. Moreover, becoming virtual learners also means that learners have to adopt a new mindset for learning which is quite divergent from the one in traditional teaching and learning environments (Muliyah et al., 2020). To illustrate, there is a huge demand for independence and self-control for a real accomplishment. Learners may be

unsure about how to navigate in environments with lessened control due to their familiarity with the manipulation of a teacher.

Meanwhile, one of the underlying factors which contribute to the success as well as a failure of the online course is online learning readiness (OLR) (Rivera, 2018). At a personal level, learners can self-evaluate their preparedness as a self-reflection to get ready for the transformation. At an organizational level, collecting applicable data on students' preparedness for online learning can enable the institutions to deliver and manage courses in a way that learners can function effectively. They even can assist students in developing effective strategies to achieve better outcomes or increase their overall satisfaction with the experience (Rivera, 2018). Numerous researchers have attempted to develop survey-based instruments for self-assessing online learning readiness (Burrows & Stepanczuk, 2013; Dray et al., 2011; Hung et al., 2010; McVay, 2004; Naji et al., 2020; Pillay et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2003). These studies have shown that learners' readiness is a crucial factor in online environments. Especially, it is considered as a multifaceted concept, and its indicators may vary, depending on the contexts. For instance, in Hung et al.'s study (2010), OLR consists of 5 dimensions: self-directed learning, motivation for learning, internet self-efficacy, online communication self-efficacy, and learner control, while Pillay et al.'s (2006) identified four constructs: technical skills, learner self-efficacy, learning preference and learner attitude. Recent investigations have also been conducted into the relationship between OLR and students' perception, online engagement, and achievement (Prihastiwati et al., 2021; Warden et al., 2020; Wei & Chou, 2020). These outcomes reveal that OLR exerts a certain observable effect on students' performance as well engagement in online learning. Regarding online learning in the Vietnamese context, only a few studies were carried out to assess students' satisfaction (Dinh & Nguyen, 2020, Tran & Nguyen, 2022) and to determine the factors that influence students' intentions of studying online (Maheshwari, 2021). How ready the students are for online learning is still under-researched.

Taken together, given the vital role of OLR in the online learning environment, this paper aims to examine the level of OLR of Vietnamese EFL learners in a private university in Ho Chi Minh city when they are required to take online learning courses as a replacement for traditional learning due to the ongoing pandemic. As their individual experiences shape learners' OLR under the influence of specific contexts and processes (Holt et al., 2007), it is essential to conduct an investigation into learners' OLR in the Vietnamese context where online learning is still in its infancy. The originality of this study is that it, for the first time, explores learners' preparedness for online learning in the Vietnamese context with a focus on learners' comfort and their self-directed ability in the online learning space as predictors of OLR.

## Literature review

### *Online learning readiness (OLR)*

According to Holt et al. (2007), readiness is not a trait but a state because it is conceptualized as an individual's attitude toward a particular change. This attitude is shaped and evolves based

on individual experience with the organization and its cultures under the influence of the content, the process, the context, and the individuals. Therefore, at a certain point of a transformation, the level of readiness is different. During the outbreak of coronavirus disease, the fact that face-to-face learning replaces online learning is inevitable. In this regard, learners' OLR has been considered as a contributing factor to their performances as well as their satisfaction in online learning. The earliest attempt to identify the components of OLR is by Warner et al. (1988), who suggested that OLR includes students' preference for online mode, students' competence as well as confidence in utilizing digital communications for learning, and their capacity to participate in autonomous environments actively.

Later, many studies have been done to identify the indicators of OLR. The first two variables developed by McVay (2000) are comfort with e-learning and self-management or self-directed learning ability in e-learning. These constructs were then validated by Smith et al. (2003) as an applicable research instrument in assessing readiness for online learning. After that, the notion of OLR was expanded to adapt to the requirements of the advances as well as the prevalence of technology. For instance, Hung et al. (2010) implemented a survey among 1051 students and discovered five dimensions of OLR: self-directed learning, motivation for learning, internet self-efficacy, online communication self-efficacy, and learner control. They concluded that two factors, learner control and self-directed learning, need more attention. Recently, Wei and Chou (2020) and Prihastiwati et al. (2021) utilized the Hung et al. (2010) survey to determine the effect of e-learning on learners' perception and learner's engagement, respectively. Their results indicate that the more positive students' perception is, the readier they are for online learning. Besides, self-directed learning is found to be the most influential component of e-learning readiness to engage learners, then internet self-efficacy, and online communication self-efficacy.

In another investigation with 92 students by Burrows and Stepanczuk (2013), a tool for estimating OLR was also proposed. In their study, two variables were identified: demographic and non-demographic. In the latter category, five dimensions are identified for measuring learners' OLR: learner autonomy, computer self-efficacy, attitude towards online learning, motivation, and English language self-efficacy. In the same vein, based on a review of instruments and survey of OLR, Martin et al. (2020) created a questionnaire containing four common constructs: online student characteristics, time control, technical and communication competencies. Then, it was administered to 177 students. The results reveal that students rated communication competencies the least important among the four. Moreover, compared to time management and communication, they showed more confidence in online student attributes and capacity. Furthermore, Warden et al. (2020) investigated how the difference in readiness for technology relates to learners' ability to be self-efficacious, engage, and achieve in an online class. In an online business negotiation class with 102 participants, the findings show that regardless of their level of technology readiness, students felt self-confident in fulfilling technological tasks. In contrast, students with less comfort with technology were less self-efficacious in social interactions. Unlike the above researchers, in Naji et al.'s work (2020), data

were gathered not only from a survey of 140 participants but also from 68 written reflections and eight semi-structured interviews. The results of the study indicate that early preparedness and motivation for online learning, online self-efficacy percepts, self-directed learning online, and support are not fully aware, although they have a considerable bearing on learners' readiness for changes in urgent situations.

In brief, the review of these studies demonstrates that OLR is a complex concept, and the level of readiness may change depending on the context and the learners' characteristics. Besides, OLR involves a diversity of variables or skills for learners to achieve success in online courses. Having said that, the current study seeks to explore how ready the students are regarding two readiness dimensions proposed by McVay (2004). They are learners' comfort with e-learning and their self-directed learning ability in online settings. The underlying rationale for this choice is that the study aims to get an overall picture depicting the factors that come from inside the learners rather than the external factors. Besides, since learners have no prior experiences in online learning mode but tend to show a strong resistance, it is essential to highlight their comfort with as well as their self-directed learning ability in online learning spaces.

### *Comfort with e-learning*

E-learning or online learning is a mode of learning in which teaching contents are provided online, and teaching modules are developed to strengthen learning and interactivity synchronously or asynchronously (Singh & Thurman, 2019). In this sense, comfort in online learning is described as learners' willingness to interact with peers and teachers via computer-mediated communication using emails, discussion boards, chatboxes, etc., and their confidence in accessing these resources (McVay, 2001; Smith, 2005). Virtual learning contrasts with conventional face-to-face learning in a way that it mainly relies on the electronic medium for sharing understandings, clarifying misconceptions, developing knowledge, etc. Therefore, once learners are willing to engage collaboratively with others in an electronic manner, this can allow them to achieve successful outcomes in their academic performances. The findings of a study by Warden et al. (2020) indicate that learners who tend to feel uncomfortable with technology are quite less self-efficacious in social interactions, resulting in low participation in online learning settings. Even though learners may use a wide range of technological tools for entertainment and personal development, they seem to be ill-literate in using digital knowledge to support their learning in some circumstances (Kennedy & Fox, 2013).

Moreover, constructing an online environment where students find it safe, easy, and convenient can minimize the possibility of causing them vulnerabilities, removing barriers that hindered their learning and success (Futch et al., 2016). Later, the concept of comfort with e-learning is thoroughly examined divided into different constructs such as internet self-efficacy, online communication self-efficacy communication competencies (Hung et al., 2010; Martin et al., 2020, etc.).

### *Self-direct online learning*

Previous studies have shown that self-directed learning (SDL) is one of the strong predictors for readiness for online learning (Hung et al., 2010, Naji et al., 2020, Widodo et al., 2020 etc.). In particular, this factor is found to make the biggest contribution to engagement in online learning (Prihastiwi et al., 2021). Basically, SDL is described as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (Knowles, 1975, p.18). Simply put, self-directed learners know how to decide and organize all aspects of learning to fit their personal needs. Becoming SDL not only reflects a natural human process of psychological development but also fulfills the requirements of the innovations in education that request learners to take more initiative in their learning (Knowles, 1975). These characteristics have a close connection with learners' lifelong learning tendencies (Tekkol & Demirel, 2018). Given these features, the ability of self-directing in online learning settings cannot be overlooked when learners' OLR is evaluated.

In another sense, self-direction can be seen as the integration of self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation (Garrison, 1997). These features are essential for online learners because the virtual environments place more responsibility for organizing learning on the individuals. On the other hand, online learning also lends itself to the cultivation of SDL. In online learning environments, learners have the conditions to improve their abilities to manage their overall learning activities and monitor their performances (Kim et al., 2014). When learners take control of their learning, they become more engaged and even develop a mindset for the long-term language learning goal (Haworth, 2016). As stated by Smith (2005), self-direction is a prerequisite for academic success in online environments. Learners with the ability of self-direction can achieve better performances with online learning modes (Chou, 2012). This ability can enable them to behave appropriately and to become more disciplined in their own learning journey (Lasfeto & Ulfa, 2020).

### *Research Questions*

Are university students ready for online learning? If yes, to which extent?

## **Methods**

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

The study was conducted at a private university in Ho Chi Minh City. During the COVID-19 outbreak, face-to-face learning in many areas was suspended. Instead, educational institutions were encouraged to switch to online modes of delivery. However, the majority of the students were not in favor of online learning, which led to a delay for a trimester during the outbreak. When students came back to school after the first outbreak, 304 students in 8 classes were randomly chosen to take part in the study. Participants were freshmen and sophomores with



ages ranging from 18 to 23 years old. Their majors included management, communications, marketing, and others, and they came from different regions in Vietnam. Despite their disparity in backgrounds, they all shared a commonality that was, they have never taken any English course in a full online mode.

### *Design of the Study*

As the nature of the current research was descriptive and exploratory, it adopted a questionnaire as a research instrument. It was a survey of McVay (2004), a revised version from McVay in 2000, validated by Smith et al. (2003) and Smith (2005). The survey was proved to be reliable and valid for measuring two factors: comfort with e-learning and self-management of online learning or self-directed online learning. As argued by Smith (2005), this questionnaire is an applicable and practical tool for research and practice regarding readiness for online learning with an emphasis on these two factors above. The survey consists of 14 items with a 4-point Likert scale (1= Rarely, 2= Sometimes, 3= Most of the time, 4= All of the time). The first six items were interpreted as comfort with e-learning, loaded highly on factor 1, and factor 2 were considered as self-directed online learning, including 8 items.

### *Data collection & analysis*

The questionnaire was distributed to participants during the teaching time of 8 classes chosen randomly. Students were instructed to fill out the form online by choosing the scale representing their level of agreement with 14 statements. Then, data were collected, coded, and analyzed using SPSS 14.

## **Findings and discussion**

Table 1 illustrates the descriptive statistics of the two factors as indicators of students' readiness for online learning. It can be seen that the overall participants were relatively ready for online learning. Specifically, they had an average level of comfort with e-learning ( $M=2.95$ ,  $SD=3.62$ ), and their self-directed online learning ability was fairly at an acceptable level ( $M=3.03$ ,  $SD=4.62$ ). These findings may account for the students' resistance to adopt online learning amidst the pandemic because the state of their readiness was more or less at a moderate level. A possible explanation is that students' level of comfort plays a significant role in alleviating their susceptibilities and removing roadblocks that may hinder their learning success (Futch et al., 2016).

**Table 1.** Descriptive measures of the survey factors

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>N of Items</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
Comfort with e-learning	2.95	3.62	2.38	3.44	6	.74
Self-directed online learning	3.03	4.62	2.73	3.20	8	.80

Within each of the subscales, the means and standard deviations by item are reported in Table 2. Regarding items evaluating learners' comfort with online learning, the highest value

(M=3.44) was rated for the first statement about their ability to get access to the Internet for learning, whereas the lowest value was item 4 (M=2.38) concerning the comparison between the quality of online learning and the conventional classroom learning. These results indicate that, basically, the students can have access to the Internet when they need it for their studies. Struggle with Internet access quality may be one of the barriers to online learning (Dinh & Nguyen, 2020), but in this case, for the majority of the participants in the current study, network access is not a major problem. Besides, it is interesting that most students undervalued the quality of online learning compared to the traditional learning model. This can be ascribed to the fact that students have been familiar with the face-to-face classroom as a result of their upbringing and pedagogical practices. Traditional classrooms have become students' habitual mode of learning, which involves more physical interactions, more social presence, and more teacher-centered preference (McVay, 2004). Therefore, to remove these barriers, students are required to first adopt a new mindset that is fully aware of the benefits of virtual learning, accompanied by the equipment of appropriate skills for online learning (Dhawan, 2020).

**Table 2.** Descriptive measures of the survey items

<b>Factor 1- Comfort with e-learning</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
1. I can easily access the Internet to facilitate my studies.	3.44	.71	304	.73
2. I can communicate with others online with ease.	3.07	.89	304	.71
3. I am willing to communicate actively with my classmates and instructors electronically.	2.95	.96	304	.70
4. I feel that online learning is equal to traditional learning regarding the quality.	2.38	1.02	304	.71
5. I feel that I can make use of my background and experience in my studies for online learning.	2.86	.87	304	.70
6. I am comfortable with online written communication.	3.01	.98	304	.71
<b>Factor 2- Self-directed online learning</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
7. I am willing to allocate an appropriate amount of time weekly to successfully engage in study.	3.20	.88	304	.74
8. I believe that I am a self-directed learner.	2.96	.86	304	.77
9. Reviewing prior knowledge in a course is helpful for the new learning.	3.02	.90	304	.79
10. In my studies I am self-disciplined and have no difficulty in setting aside homework time.	2.73	.94	304	.77
11. I am able to manage my study time productively and simply complete assignments on time.	3.18	.81	304	.79
12. As a student, I enjoy working by myself with a minimum of support or interaction.	2.88	.96	304	.80
13. I can set goals and highly take initiative in my studies	3.08	.78	304	.77
14. I believe no one has the responsibility for my learning except myself.	3.19	.95	304	.81

The other items (2, 3, 5, 6) were rated as Most of the time with  $M=3.07$ ,  $M=2.95$ ,  $M=2.86$ ,  $M=3.01$ , respectively. This demonstrates that students are fairly comfortable with online communication and are voluntary to communicate with classmates and instructors digitally only to some extent. These responses may reflect the findings in Kennedy and Fox's study (2013), stating that although learners are supposed to be digital natives in a sense that they can make the most of technological tools for recreational and communicative purposes on their daily basis, they tend to lack a certain of knowledge of using these resources to serve for their learning purposes.

Concerning the items evaluating learners' self-direction in online learning displayed in Table 2, no statistically significant difference was identified between the means of each statement. Most of the means were about 3.0, with the highest value at  $M=3.20$  for item 7, regarding their willingness to set aside time for effective engagement in study, and the lowest value at  $M=2.73$  for item 10 relating to their self-discipline in completing homework. These data suggest that, on average, students rated their ability to be self-directed in online learning as somewhat at a medium level. They may be aware of the responsibility for their own learning but still have a tendency to rely on the teachers. This seems to contradict the assumption that online learners are able to be highly self-directed to master the training content and use self-regulated learning strategies to have better achievements in e-learning performances (Chu & Tsai, 2009). If learners are not equipped with a high level of readiness, they are not confident and motivated to take charge of their learning or cannot benefit from their self-control and self-management abilities during the whole learning process (Lee et al., 2017). The respondents in the present study were not fully self-directed learners because they have been accustomed to the teachers' control and presence. Consequently, they perceived themselves as passive, less autonomous learners.

## Conclusions and Pedagogic Implications

To conclude, the present study aims to examine students' readiness for online learning at a private university in Ho Chi Minh City during the coronavirus pandemic. In light of the obtained findings, it can be inferred that the student's readiness for e-learning is quite moderate. Results of a survey-based self-evaluation indicate that their comfort with online learning and self-directed ability in online learning were both just at a medium level. These findings add to the rapidly expanding field of online learning during the pandemic by providing an alternative understanding of the significance of learners' readiness for online learning with an emphasis on learners' comfort and self-directed learning ability. Apparently, a shift to virtual platforms to catch up with the curriculum during the Covid-19 crisis may require different aspects of the reorientation from both learners and teachers. Especially understanding how ready these students are for virtual learning has some significant implications for educators and institutions.

In order to accommodate the transformation into fully virtual learning modes, a high level of preparedness is needed (Dhawan, 2020). In particular, for learners in a context where they have

been conditioned to depend on the teachers' presence with immediate feedback and close monitoring of their progress like the participants in this study, online learning seems to be more challenging because of the restrictions of technological tools, the suspension of feedback and the incompetence of the instructor to handle resources appropriately digitally (Muthuprasad et al., 2021). Most importantly, learners at these ages are mainly influenced by their backgrounds in ways that tend to stifle their abilities to be self-directing in a particular learning situation (Brookfield, 2009). The cultural contexts may have molded their needs, values, and beliefs. Therefore, for effective implementation of online learning, orientation courses about all aspects of online learning should be offered from the outset. These courses should aim to raise learners' awareness of the merits of virtual learning and provide encouragement and reassurance for developing a new mindset in online learning. This may help learners gain a more accurate perception of virtual learning, resulting in less resistance to the transformation. Furthermore, the insights gained from this study are helpful for teachers to understand their students better and to reconsider their teaching approaches in giving instructions in online settings. As stated by McVay (2004), the role of the teachers in a world full of data and uncertainty is "not to provide information but to guide students wading through the deep waters of the information flood" (p.15). By doing that, teachers can train the students to develop and sharpen their self-directed learning abilities. Moreover, based on the characteristics of learners, course developers should also consider designing online learning venues in which learners feel comfortable and confident to complete their assignments. Above all, a learning system should be built with conditions to develop students' self-directed learning ability. Essential strategies for self-direction should also be accessible to learners in case they may need consultation.

Despite the significant contributions to the current related field, the study has a few weaknesses. Since the survey was administered before the implementation of online learning, it was not possible to evaluate learners' readiness regarding their technological competencies. Future work should investigate this issue to see how different these learners have changed when coping with tasks in online learning in this context. Besides, although the teachers' readiness for online learning is also a contributing factor to the success of online learning, it is beyond the scope of this study.

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## The challenges of Rural Students in Vietnam towards higher education

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** rural student, higher education, difficulties, education experiences

This study aims to explore the challenges and difficulties that rural students experience when they transition to Higher Education in Vietnam to pursue their higher studies. This study was carried out at a local University in Vietnam. It is a qualitative research study, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. The participants were all first-year students, including males and females. The interviews involved answering semi-structured questions. Multiple interviews were carried out with each participant. The study discovered that rural students experience many difficulties at university in relation to their relationships with teachers and peers, getting support, overcoming prejudice, online learning, and economic hardship.

### Introduction

Education is a driving force for economic and social development. In developing countries like Vietnam, education underpins future national prosperity, and governments have made major efforts over recent decades to enhance the country's educational performance. For many rural and economically disadvantaged students, going to university is considered the only way to get out of their difficult situation to achieve a better life (Pang, 2017). However, going to university is not plain sailing for these students. They have to leave their home and family to move to a big city to pursue their study. In their study, they meet many difficulties, and many students end up leaving school when they fail to overcome these challenges (Gil, Antelm-Lanzat, Cacheiro-Gonzalez, Perez-Navio, 2019).

Vietnam is primarily an agricultural country, and a large proportion of the population lives in rural regions (Office, 2020). Many are farm-dependent and have no other income other than what their farm provides (Tuyen et al., 2015). Many who live in rural and mountainous communities are categorized as poor and below-poor families. Poor households, on average, earn around \$90 per month (GSO, 2021). In addition, transport is a big issue in mountainous



areas, especially during the rainy seasons (Khánh & Kiên, 2021).

Moving from high school to university is a major turning point in a student's life. For each student, the first year is often the most difficult period because students' have to change their living environment as well as to start an independent life with new methods and ways of learning (Long, 2007). It is a difficult time even for urban students who are from large cities and town centers. For students from rural and remote areas, it is even more difficult. So as to help the rural students to overcome their difficulties and integrate well with the new learning environment, there is a need for a high level of collaboration between teachers, universities, families, and students. Only by doing this are the goals of the Vietnam government going to be achieved.

## Literature review

### *Students have basic human needs*

Students have basic needs for safety, food, comfort, acceptance, regard, and protection. When basic human needs are unmet, this obstructs learning, motivation, attention, and engagement (Maslow, 1987). As a human being, each person needs sensual enjoyment, affiliation, self-regard, safety, order, or understanding (Streeten, 1971). Betoret and Artiga (2011) state that if students' psychological satisfaction need is met, they tend to be more confident in their class and have better learning outcomes at school (Betoret & Artiga, 2011).

The need to belong is a basic human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). A sense of belonging results from the development of positive classroom relationships. Negative relationships with peers pose a threat to one's sense of safety. Bullying, rejection, social exclusion, discrimination, abuse, and neglect undermine a student's sense of belonging and safety which are critically important for their social and academic functioning. Loneliness, social discrimination, isolation, and discrimination are serious challenges that need to be addressed if students are to feel safe, have a sense of belonging, and be successful students (Maslow, 1987; Buhs et al., 2016; Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010).

### *Learning is not just a solitary activity.*

It is shaped by relationships, circumstances, and situational factors. Learning is not separate from peoples' personal and social lives. People do not live their lives as solitary individuals, and their lives are linked and interdependent (Feinstein et al., 2008). In this study, the researcher takes a socio-ecological approach to study the challenges experienced by participants (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Fitzgibbon et al., 2014). A socio-ecological approach will study student behavior from levels, ranging from the student as an individual to the student as a member of a family to the student as a member of a peer group to the student as a member of a class group and school community to the student as a member of a neighborhood. These levels are assumed to be interdependent and to influence each other mutually. So as to understand a person, the factors such as culture, effects of peer group, school-to-work transitions, teacher-

student relationship, demand, status, and morale need considering (Davies, 2012).

*Relationships with teachers, peers, friends, partners, and family play a key role in students' lives and learning.*

Relationships can provide students with safety, care, support, companionship, fun, and intimacy, but they do not always do so ( Baafi, 2020; Duchesne & McMaugh, 2016). People's basic human needs are met through their relationships. If their basic needs are not met, then this negatively impacts their learning and lives. Relationships can be assets and liabilities (Giliker, 2010). Negative relationships can be stressful, painful, and a source of much unhappiness (Krause et al., 2010). Relationships are resources and key determinants of our well-being and mental health. Relationships are an important safety net at times of difficulty (Murray-Harvey, 2010).

*The teacher-student relationship is of central importance to teaching and learning.*

Positive teacher-student relationships are based upon two-way open communication, mutual liking, support, encouragement, responsiveness, and self-disclosure (Baafi, 2020). Effective communication and collaboration are at the heart of teaching and learning. If teachers are perceived as unapproachable or if students engage in self-silencing, this seriously undermines teacher-student collaboration and student learning (Runions et al., 2021). Negative relationships with teachers can severely disrupt student learning, motivation, sense of well-being, and working cooperatively with others (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010).

*Friends provide important benefits and advantages for students*

Friends perform important roles as confidants, companions, supporters and shield each other from social difficulties (McGrath & Noble, 2010). They can also provide help and encouragement in coping with challenges. Having friends is an antidote to loneliness and social isolation. Friends are necessities, not luxuries.

*Social support helps students cope with challenges and difficulties.*

Social support plays a crucial role in students and their learning outcomes at school (Balzer Carr & London, 2019). Gao and colleagues studied the role of support with students in China and affirmed that the students who receive support from friends, teachers, and family have higher achievement at school than the others (Gao et al., 2021). Lack of social support can result in the student's not coping, procrastination, and dropping out of education. Social support includes emotional validation as well as practical support (Ertel et al., 2009; Balzer Carr & London, 2019; Runions et al., 2021).

*Self-efficacy beliefs shape a student's motivation and perseverance when there are challenges or difficulties.*

Students who do not believe they cannot perform tasks are likely to avoid attempting these tasks and to give up when they experience difficulties (Bandura, 1977, 1997, 1986). When a student loses his or her self-confidence, they will lose motivation in learning. Thus this type of student

often chooses to avoid their problems in learning instead of finding a solution for them (Pang, 2017). In contrast, students who have strong self-efficacy tend to seek help from their teachers or peers with their learning difficulties and be successful at school (Gao et al., 2021).

### *Choice of coping strategies influences the outcomes and how successfully they address difficulties.*

Coping strategies such as help-seeking, self-silencing, procrastination, avoidance coping, and communal coping influence the learning outcomes (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Murray-Harvey, 2010). The academic achievement and help-seeking frequency are significantly correlated as their problems are solved in time (Mahasneh et al., 2012). Positive, projective, denial, and non-coping are popular among Turkish students (Metem & Subasi, 2020). Positive students often try to solve their problems by seeking help from the other, while denial or non-coping tend to avoid their learning issues.

### *Social and physical resources influence student learning*

Poverty differentially exposes people to stressors, problems, and challenges (Hobfoll, 2002). Giacchino-Baker (2007) states that 'economic conditions and inequities continue to be the primary causes of education gaps in Vietnam' (p. 170) and that 'socioeconomic status still affects attitudes toward rural students' abilities' (Giacchino-Baker, 2007, p.173). Unequal access to technology means some students are discriminated against when they are required to learn online.

When referring to rural students, this means they are students who come from rural families and rural areas. "Rural refers to open areas of a country with a small number of settlements, these areas are characterized by a dependence on agriculture and natural resources; high prevalence of poverty, isolation, and marginality; neglect by policymakers; and lower human development" (Dasgupta et al., 2017, p. 618). Rural families are often poor and live in remote regions (Tuyen et al., 2015), where economic hardship results in practical difficulties for students and their parents. Koricich et al. (2018) stated that rural students have fewer opportunities to attend prestigious or highly competitive schools, especially in higher education, because of their socioeconomic status (Koricich et al., 2018).

### *Research Questions*

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey was seeking to answer the following research questions:

What challenges do rural students in Vietnam experience when they transition to studying at university?

## Methods

### *University Setting & Participants*

Participants were from the University of Foreign Language Studies (UFLS) in Da Nang, Vietnam. The UFLS's mission is to train the central and highland provinces' language skills and labor force (Phuc, 2021). Da Nang is a city that is a central hub for tourism, education, and economic activity.

Ten student participants were chosen randomly and were then invited to participate in this study. All participants were in their first year of study and came from rural regions in Vietnam. Participation in this study was voluntary and based on informed consent and the maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity. 4 male and six female students volunteered to be participants. The author conducted the interviews.

The interviews used in this study explored the areas highlighted in the above assumptions. Questions asked focused on such issues as the teacher-student relationship, life challenges, coping strategies used, experiences of social support, the nature of peer relationships, experiences of negative relationships, unmet needs, etc.

### *Design of the Study*

This qualitative study used a case study methodology as described by Yin (2003) and Stake (2005). In this study, ten student case studies were developed based on interview data from the students. Each of the 10 case studies focused on the challenges and difficulties students' experienced during their study at university.

### *Data collection*

Multiple one-on-one interviews were held with each of the student participants. Students participants were interviewed on a number of occasions to assist in the development of trust and rapport (Seidman, 2013). With participants' permission, interviews were recorded on a digital recorder.

Interview questions were semi-structured using both open-ended and closed questions (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Each interview lasted 30 to 40 minutes and was conducted in a room at the university that provided visual and auditory privacy. Member checking was used to ensure the credibility of the data collected.

### *Data analysis*

Interview data were partially transcribed and typed into Microsoft Word files. Because of the number of interviews carried out, the decision was taken to only partially transcribe interviews to make the task more manageable within the study's time constraints. Ten separate case studies were developed by triangulating interview data from the students' interviews (Yin, 2003). After developing the ten case studies, commonalities and differences between them were identified and analyzed in terms of learning difficulties.

## Findings

### *The Teacher-Student Relationship*

All study participants expressed the belief that their teachers were unapproachable. As a result of this, participants engaged in self-silencing if they had difficulties, and teachers gained little understanding of their students' ongoing difficulties and concerns. These students generally struggled on their own to resolve any difficulties. This means their teachers were to some extent blind and deaf to their difficulties.

*“Our teachers are very busy with their teaching so they don't care much about our difficulties in learning. They just come to class when the lesson starts and leave immediately after lesson. We have many problems want to ask our teachers but as you can see, we have no opportunities. I have to resolve my problems by myself” (Mai).*

A healthy teacher-student relationship is based upon open two-way communication, encouragement of and valuing help-seeking, collaborative problem solving, and providing support when needed. Improving the teacher-student relationship would greatly assist these rural students' learning and collaboration.

### *Peer Relationships*

9 of 10 participants saw few opportunities to build friendships or positive relationships with peers either in or of the classroom. There was little opportunity for group work or participation in community projects, peer support programs, or sports teams.

*“In class, I often feel lonely as there is no one else coming from my community. The other classmates come from the other places and they have already known each other. I find it very difficult to make friend. They tend to play and talk to each other and of course I am ignored. I feel I am inferior in group work or discussion in the class” (Nam).*

There were very limited social or sporting activities they could participate in. While the university occasionally organized sports tournaments, participants usually were expected to have expertise in the sports involved. Because they usually came from districts where they did not have an opportunity to develop expertise in these sports, rural students found themselves excluded from such activities.

Participants generally felt inferior and second-class citizens to their urban-based peers. They recognized that they had not had the same opportunities or the same socioeconomic advantages as their city-based peers. Their parents were less well educated, they had fewer amenities at home, and their rural schools were more poorly resourced.

In order to avoid attracting negative attention, all of the 10 participants talked about deliberately keeping quiet and silent in class and seeking to avoid making mistakes, which others can interpret as evidence that they are ignorant or academically inferior. Study participants generally felt lonely, isolated, and to some degree, social outcasts. This posed a special challenge for them, robbing them of confidence and self-esteem.

From interviews with their teachers, this researcher found that teachers did not see it as part of their role to build and encourage peer relationships or to reduce the prejudice or stigma experienced by rural students.

### *Sense of Belonging*

80% of participants did not feel a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging is about being valued and included and feeling one matters. Belonging to a group is important. The only group they felt they might belong to one was an outcast group. The research shows that lack of school belongingness and connectedness often predicts depression.

*“I often feel lonely at school. I am too different from the others in my class. They have stylish clothes and hairstyles. My thinking and language are different from their as well” (Loan).*

### *Support Provided/Available*

When their teachers cannot or do not support them with difficulties or concerns, they have to sort out problems by themselves. All of the participants could not rely on their family or friends to help them for a variety of reasons, including lack of friends, distance from home, and their parents' limited education. Rural students at university live some distance from their parents and home communities.

### *Sense of Self-Efficacy*

All of the studied participants expressed a low sense of academic self-efficacy. They were struggling with the work and had self-esteem.

*“I think am not good at learning at all when I participate in the class. My classmates are too smart and their ideas are very brilliant. After hearing their words, all the ideas disappear from my head” (Ngoc).*

### *Student Coping Strategies*

All participants were limited in their choice of coping strategies. Given their perception of their teachers as unapproachable and the lack of other sources of support, they were left with struggling on their own, giving up, making out they were coping (self-silencing), and avoidance coping. Study participants said they were fearful of some of their teachers, which was another reason they did not try to ask their teachers for help. Another reason might have been not knowing what help to ask for. If one does not understand something, it can be hard to ask for help in relation to it.

### *Sense of Inferiority*

Seven of 10 participants did express a sense of inferiority attached to the fact that they were rural students. They perceived themselves as being ignored or looked down up by their teachers and urban peers. No one at the university was seen as taking any steps to address this prejudice or discrimination. They perceived themselves as socially discriminated and considered less academically and socially able.

Teachers were not seen as taking any steps to get to know them as people or to listen to their voices. So rural students perceived themselves as voiceless and, to some extent, social outcasts. In working with marginalized students, listening to them requires not only open eyes and ears but open hearts and minds and putting one's beliefs on hold. Without undertaking this kind of listening, change is unlikely.

### *Learning Online*

When COVID-19 resulted in teaching and learning online, this added to the difficulties experienced by study participants. All of the 10 participants did not have the technology, technological knowledge, or support to get the most out of online learning. Having access to mobile phones with their very small screens and unreliable and unstable internet connections in rural areas severely disadvantaged rural students engaged in online learning. Some learning platforms are not suitable for use with a mobile phone. Communicating clearly and clarifying instructions online poses further problems. Access to help and support is not any easier in an online context. It takes teachers and students considerable time to be competent in using technology in language teaching and learning. Some platforms such as LMS, Teams, or Exam are sophisticated and require much time for both teachers and students to learn.

### *Economic Hardship*

All participants in this study came from low-income families where their main income was from farming. Farming activities depend upon the weather, and weather conditions fluctuate markedly. This means family incomes vary from one year to the next. Participants said that they are anxious and stressed whenever school fees are due if the fees cannot be paid.

As a requirement for graduation, the final year students are required to have achieved a C1 certificate in English proficiency or 7.0 IELTS. In order to gain this certificate, it is necessary to participate in extra lessons. Families cannot always afford for their children to attend these lessons. For these students, extra classes at language centers are too expensive for them. Family economic hardship puts a lot of stress and pressure on rural students (Luong & Nieke, 2013).

## **Discussion**

When studying away from home, students face many challenges in their learning as well as in their daily life (Nghiem et al., 2021). The challenges experienced by study participants are many and varied, but there is not a common agreement or understanding about what the problems are or what needs to be done about them. For example, improving the teacher-student relationship is not, this may be believed that generally seen as the major problem, nor is addressing the loneliness, sense of isolation, and perceived inferiority of rural students. Students' relationship has been mentioned as one of the main learning and teaching issues that need to be taken into consideration by teachers and educators (Maslow, 1987; Baafi, 2020).

There is probably more general agreement about the need to provide more academic support for students with learning and academic difficulties (Linh & Ngo, 2021). But focusing simply

on providing more academic support will not address the other challenges identified in this study, such as the need to provide additional social and emotional support.

It is suspected one of the problems in recognizing the need to improve the teacher-student relationship is that many teachers think that when students are well-behaving, they have a good relationship with them, even when the student is generally silent (i.e., self-silencing) (Tu & Chu, 2020). Behavioral compliance by itself is not evidence of a positive relationship. It is believed such thinking needs to change. We need to consider positive teacher-student relationships as based upon the openness of communication, mutual liking, collaborative assessment and problem solving, provision of encouragement, and mutual respect.

Building positive teacher-student relationships and peer relationships needs to be acknowledged and recognized as a key educational goal for all educators (Baafi, 2020). It needs to be recognized that a student's basic human needs are met primarily through having positive relationships with their teachers and classmates. Positive relationships provide people with important benefits and advantages that enhance motivation, learning, and well-being. Two key benefits of positive relationships are companionship and social support. At times of difficulty, positive relationships provide an extremely important safety net.

### **Limitations**

This research was a pilot study, and there are a number of limitations. It is only a small sample and does not necessarily reflect the perceptions and experiences of other rural students in Vietnam. Participants in this study included only first-year students and did not include students from other year levels or from across all the different rural regions in Vietnam. It also did not assess the learning or cognitive needs of participants.

While this was only a pilot study, it has identified a number of critical educational issues for this particular group of rural participants. Further research is needed, and it is important to determine the generality of these findings for rural students in Higher Education in Vietnam and in other countries.

### **Conclusion**

When rural students perceive that they do not socially belong at an urban-based University, and they perceive their teachers and lecturers as unapproachable and unwilling to help them; when they engage in self-silencing as a way of coping or surviving; when their basic human needs are unheard, unrecognized and unmet; when they believe they are socially inferior and disconnected from the majority of their classmates, and they feel lonely and lacking in self-efficacy and social support; when they only have access to inferior technology that is needed to participate effectively in online learning, then these conditions and beliefs negatively impact upon their motivation, participation and achievement, and their sense of well-being and mental health.



As educators of rural students, we need to listen carefully and sensitively to the voices of our students - to listen to their feelings, needs and perceptions. We need to work collaboratively with our students to meet their basic human needs better and help overcome their challenges and difficulties. In addition, it is necessary to replace self-silencing and a sense of loneliness and isolation with a truly collaborative two-way partnership that promotes the development of positive relationships, personal growth, and self-efficacy.

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### **Biodata**


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## Procedural and Declarative Knowledge: The Swedish and Vietnamese learners' acquisition of knowledge in English grammar, and Pedagogical Implications

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### ABSTRACT

In this study, the L2 acquisition of English third person-s in different settings is examined. Two types of knowledge are declarative knowledge as the knowledge about a grammatical rule, and procedural knowledge as the ability to use these rules in spoken production. Data on procedural and declarative knowledge was collected from 32 young L2 learners in Sweden and 44 in Vietnam. The learners' acquisition of English grammar was assessed using elicitation instruments that captured procedural and declarative knowledge of English subject-verb agreement on third person singular *s* (3-sg-s). Procedural knowledge was tested using communicative tasks where the participants were asked to describe a boy's habitual action orally in a picture series. Declarative knowledge of grammar was investigated by means of a metalinguistic task. The learners were asked to correct the sentences and explain the reasons for their choices by referring to grammatical rules. The average scores on procedural and declarative tests within each group were statistically analyzed. The results show differences in learner outcomes, in that the Swedish learners are better at procedural knowledge and the Vietnamese learners are better at declarative knowledge. It is suggested the two types of knowledge are independent of each other. Implications for language learning and teaching for young learners will be further discussed based on the teaching practices as found in Son (2018).

**Keywords:** English language teaching, procedural knowledge, declarative knowledge, second language acquisition

### Introduction

The two kinds of declarative and procedural knowledge are different. This paper addresses a crucial point in second language acquisition (SLA) and in foreign language teaching: the relationship between a declarative concept that is typically taught and procedural knowledge as the ability to produce the target language in speech. The two kinds of linguistic knowledge: declarative versus procedural knowledge, have been discussed within SLA research for

decades, and it has a clear pedagogical significance. Can declarative knowledge lead to procedural knowledge? Should grammar rules be taught? This paper aims to examine the declarative and procedural knowledge in young language learners at Grade 5 in two contexts; Sweden, where there is a communicative approach to English teaching for young learners while focus on form is dominant in some Vietnamese classrooms of English (Son, 2018). 32 Swedish learners and 44 Vietnamese learners at the age of 11-12 years old took part in the two tasks: a declarative knowledge task and a procedural knowledge task. The findings will discuss the two types of knowledge and the implication for English language teaching for young learners.

## Literature review

### *Declarative and procedural knowledge*

The difference found in many second language classrooms, between on the one side, a metalinguistic knowledge of a grammar rule, and on the other hand, its actual use in L2 speech production has been discussed as a difference between two types of knowledge, declarative and procedural knowledge. These concepts go back to two memory systems to store information: declarative and procedural memory. Declarative memory refers to conscious memories that can be talked about (facts, names, telephone numbers). In contrast, procedural memory is about how to do things without conscious awareness (ride a bicycle, play the piano by ear). What is important for SLA is the interaction between the two. A telephone number (declarative memory) can be used so many times that it becomes automatic and thus be part of procedural memory. Does this happen to the third person present singular -s? Does knowing a grammar rule from declarative memory result in procedural (or implicit) knowledge? The critical point is, in that case, how teachers can optimize second language learning in the classroom. There are three theoretical positions; the strong interface position (e.g., DeKeyser 1995, 1997), the weak interface position (e.g., Doughty & Williams 1998, Pienemann 1998; Hulstijn 1995), and the non-interface position (e.g., Krashen 1982, Paradis 2004). These positions ascribe different effects of grammar rule teaching – the strong position claiming that declarative knowledge will be transformed into procedural knowledge, the weak position assuming that this is possible only under certain conditions, and the non-interface position saying that there will be no effect and that there is no connection between the two.

According to Anderson's (1983) ACT model (Adaptive Control of Thought), the learner moves from declarative to procedural knowledge in three phases: 1) a cognitive phase, where the declarative rule is learned; 2) an associative phase where the learner processes the rule; and 3) the autonomous phase, where production becomes automatic. This makes sense to teachers since it can explain why learners do not use the descriptive rule in the same moment that it is given by the teacher – it takes time, and there are certain phases to go through. Sorace (1985)'s study could be exemplifying phase 2 in Anderson's ACT, where learners are processing the rule. The partly “backwards development” leads us over to the other kind in the knowledge dichotomy, the possibility of having only procedural knowledge. Procedural knowledge differs

from declarative knowledge. Bialystok (2001) defines metalinguistic ability as “the capacity to use knowledge about language as opposed to the capacity to use language” (Bialystok, 2001, p.124). Paradis (2004) refers to procedural memory as the more fundamental memory and as what young children use during the onset of language acquisition. The declarative memory becomes stronger during development, but children still rely on procedural knowledge around the age of three years. Children are able to create grammatical rules without declarative and metalinguistic knowledge. This was shown by Berko (1958) in an experimental study on noun plural formation, where children generated plural forms of non-words (*wug*->*wugs*).

Studies of L2 acquisition suggest that, like L1 learners, also L2 learners can use their procedural memory in language acquisition and acquire grammar without declarative rules (Krashen, 1982; Meisel, Clahsen & Pienemann, 1981). Processability Theory (PT; Pienemann 1998, 2015) predicts L2 development of grammar in developmental stages by gradually accessing the processing procedures needed for production. A key concept in the description of the learner's grammar is the "unification of features" operationalized in Lexical-Functional Grammar (Bresnan, 2001). For the L2 acquisition of English morpho-syntax, five stages have been identified (Pienemann, 1998). The stages are: Stage 1 with no morphology, Stage 2 with lexical morphology (*dogs<sub>SPL</sub>*), Stage 3 with the unification of features within a phrase (*many<sub>PL</sub> dogs<sub>SPL</sub>*), Stage 4 with the interphrasal information Yes/No inversion, Stage 5 with the unification of features across phrases, lexical verbs (*she<sub>3pSGpres</sub> likes<sub>3pSGpres</sub> dogs*), and finally Stage 6 with the unification of features across clause borders in the subordinate clause procedure, realized in the difference between direct and indirect questions. The order of emergence of these stages has been supported by data in a number of empirical studies of L2 English (Di Biase, Kawaguchi & Yamaguchi, 2015; Dyson, 2009; Itani-Adams, 2007; Lenzing, 2013; Pienemann, 1998, 2005; Pienemann & Keßler, 2011; Yamaguchi, 2009) and also in a number of other languages (see Dyson & Håkansson, 2017). The late appearance of third-person singular -s in the PT hierarchy of stages could be one explanation of the problem found in L2 studies of English (Son, 2018; Ellis, 2006; Källkvist & Peterson, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Lenzing, 2013; Lightbown, 1983; Siemund & Lechner, 2015). It could also explain why other late structures, such as Dutch subclause word order (Hulstijn, 1995) and Spanish subjunctive (Gutiérrez, 2017) belong to stage 5 are found to be problematic to teach.

#### *Earlier research on the relationship between declarative and procedural knowledge in SLA*

The terms declarative and procedural knowledge are often used interchangeably with explicit and implicit knowledge (Ellis, 2008). Empirical studies comparing knowledge of the rules and usage of the rules in production give mixed results (e.g., DeKeyser, 1995, 1997; Goldschneider & DeKeyser, 2001; Green & Hecht 1992; Gutierrez, 2017; Ellis, 2005; Hulstijn & Hulstijn, 1984; Roehr & Gánem-Gutiérrez, 2009; Robinson, 1996; Seliger, 1979; Sorace, 1985). One explanation for the contradictory results is the differences between the scope and methodologies used in these studies. Some studies use artificial language (e.g., DeKeyser, 1995, 1997, DeGraaf, 1997; Reber et al., 1980), and others use natural languages (e.g., Hulstijn, 1995; Seliger, 1979; Sorace, 1985). Some investigate the value of language instruction in general,

whereas others compare different types of instruction or focus on the benefit of teaching a specific grammar rule. In a meta-study of publications between 1980 and 1998, Norris & Ortega (2000) summarized 49 studies of explicit and implicit types of instruction. The general finding from this meta-study is that explicit teaching is successful for L2 acquisition. However, the heterogeneity is problematic for generalizing. There were different types of instruction (e.g., Focus on form, Focus on forms, Focus on meaning) and also different ways of measuring the outcome, language proficiency. Proficiency was often measured by tasks with a focus on forms, such as metalinguistic judgments and sentence completion exercises, and just a minority of the studies used tasks with a focus on communication (i.e., procedural knowledge in the sense of Pienemann, 1998). Furthermore, the studies show a predominance of studies of adult university students taking foreign language classes, and only a minority (21%) were younger learners.

Studies focusing on declarative-procedural teaching have not found clear differences between the outcomes. A problem with studies comparing declarative and procedural knowledge is that the results tend to be written tests for both kinds of knowledge (Ellis, 2012, p.56). It is possible that this kind of data only taps into the explicit knowledge. In a study comparing different elicitation methods, Ellis (2008) found that grammatical judgment data and metalinguistic data did not follow the same incremental stages of acquisition that Processability Theory predicts, but that the oral data followed the stages. This demonstrates that the same data cannot measure procedural and declarative knowledge. It is possible that using free oral speech to measure procedural knowledge would have given clearer differences between declarative and procedural knowledge in the studies presented above.

### *Research Aim and Question*

The aim of this paper is to examine the declarative and procedural knowledge in two contexts; Sweden, where there is a communicative approach to English teaching for young learners while focus on form is dominant in some Vietnamese classrooms for English (Son, 2018). To fill in the gaps of previous studies, two different kinds of tasks were used to measure procedural and declarative knowledge on the third person singular -s.

1. What is the declarative and procedural knowledge of English third-person singular *s* for Swedish and Vietnamese young learners after the same amount of classroom instruction?

## **Methods**

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

The participants come from two urban schools in Sweden (No: 32, 12 females) and three urban schools in Vietnam (No: 44, 28 females) (see Table 1). The children at 11-12 years old were nearing the end of Grade 5 and had studied English for 3 years. They have received two weekly English lessons, approximately 70 hours in each grade (for Grades 3, 4 and 5). Each participant was presented with two tasks: a declarative knowledge task and a procedural knowledge task.



Table 1. Swedish and Vietnamese learner data (Adapted from Son, 2018, p.96)

Learner Data	Swedish group		Vietnamese group		
	School 1	School 2	School 1	School 2	School 3
	Class 1	Class 2	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3
<b>Children</b>	20	21	35	36	38
<b>Participants</b>	18	14	15	15	14

### *Data collection & analysis*

Specific elicitation instruments were used to tap into declarative and procedural knowledge of the learners' English. Procedural knowledge was tested using communicative tasks on the habitual action of the same type as described in Pienemann (1998, p. 280). The participants were asked to describe Peter's daily activities as shown in a picture series. This task was designed to allow learners to describe the habitual actions of a person and elicit the responses needed for producing third-person-s (Son, 2018).

The children were individually audio-recorded. The learners were recorded one at a time in a separate room. The recordings were transcribed by the author using the CHAT standard (Codes for the Human Analysis of Transcripts) as used in the Child Language Data Exchange System (MacWhinney, 2000). In the recordings, there are very few terms produced by the researcher, for example, short back-channeling cues ( i.e., 'yes', 'that is right', 'ok', 'that is good') and nodding, meaning yes, to keep the conversation going and for the children to continue their speech.

Different criteria for acquisition as procedural knowledge are used in various SLA theories. This study applied PT emergence criterion as the "first systematic use" of a morphosyntactic structure (Pienemann, 1984, p. 191). A distributional analysis was applied to support the emergence criterion in order to avoid memorized chunks, e.g., all verbs with – s in the context of 3-sg-s- were counted. So, two productive uses of 3-sg-s with two different verb types (with lexical variation: *eats*, *sleeps* and morphological variation: *goes*, *go*) in the oral picture-description task of the habitual actions were considered as the evidence of acquisition of the target structure in spoken production as procedural knowledge.

Declarative knowledge of grammar was tested by means of a metalinguistic task. A test with four questions about 3-sg-s in English was administered to the participants. The participants were asked to correct the sentences and explain the reasons for their choices by referring to grammatical rules. The grammatical rule for subject-verb agreement defined by Pienemann (1998) and Hasselgård, Johansson, & Lysvåg (1998) as the standard explanation is the

agreement in number, person, and tense between the subject and lexical verb. 3-sg-s was considered part of declarative knowledge when the learner got the correct answers (compared to the standard definition) for two of the four questions. The same procedures of the same task type were used in earlier studies (cf. Cohen & Robbins, 1976; Källkvist & Peterson, 2006; Malmberg et al., 2000; Sorace, 1985).

### Scoring

For scoring of the declarative knowledge, the schema from Roehr & Gánem-Gitiérrez (2009) was used. A correct answer gets 1 point. The correct and satisfying explanation gets 2 points (Son, 2018, p. 100). As for the production of the grammatical rule, the frequency of use of the linguistic context for the third-person-s structure was counted. The procedural knowledge was measured using the methodology in Processability Theory (Pienemann 1998), and the emergence criteria were used; i.e., examples of the structure third-person singular present -s, with two different lexical verbs in two obligatory contexts. Regarding the correlation between the learners' linguistic knowledge, the average scores on procedural and declarative tests within each group were calculated and statistically analyzed.

### Results

The analyses reveal different profiles for the Swedish and Vietnamese learners on declarative and procedural knowledge. The Swedish learners performed better than the Vietnamese on the procedural tasks. Twenty-one of the Swedish learners (62%) used third-person singular present -s at least on two occasions with different verbs (according to the emergence criterion (Pienemann, 1998)). e.g., *he plays, he eats*. For the Vietnamese learners, only sixteen learners (36%) scored high on the procedural task. Below are some samples of the transcripts that show the learners' spoken production of 3Sg-s at least with two different lexical verbs in two obligatory contexts.

#### Learner 11

\*CHI11 and the books [//] the book Peter reads is called the moon

\*CHI11 and then he plays football after school (.) with his friend

\*CHI11 and there he goes in the school bus to school because ye(a)h  
his parents working and they can't drive him

#### Learner 18

\*CHI18 he eats sandwiches.

\*CHI18 on the break, he plays soccer with his friends

#### Learner 20

\*CHI20 after &er that he likes to play footballs [//] football &er with his friends

\*CHI20 after the lunch, he [/] (.) he reads books.

*Learner 29*

\*CHI29 sunshine is up , and (.) ye(a)h

\*CHI29 and (.) then he goes up and takes a shower

\*CHI29 hmm and (.) then later &er (.) he eats his breakfast with (...) the corn

\*CHI29 then he needs to go to school and waits for the bus

*Learner 30*

\*CHI30 Peter, first he wakes up in his bed .

\*CHI30 and he takes a shower

\*CHI30 and after the shower, he eats (.) breakfast

Regarding the declarative knowledge test, sixteen Vietnamese learners (out of 44; 36%) were able to rule for third-person singular -s in all four examples, which none of the Swedish learners could do. Eight of the Vietnamese learners (18%) gave an appropriate rule for three examples, while 13 learners (30%) gave no correct explanations. On the other hand, few of the Swedish learners were able to verbalize a rule; one learner (3%) described a rule for three examples, six learners (19%) gave a rule for one example each, while 24 learners (75%) gave incorrect explanations. Some of the learners in both groups replied that 'it sounds good or wrong'.

Furthermore, the correlation between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge is not significant for either group (See Figure 1); neither for the Swedish learners ( $r = 0.20, p = 0.185$ ) nor for the Vietnamese learners ( $r = 0.22, p = 0.220$ ). This suggests that there is no relationship between the children's ability to explain the rule and their use of the rule in oral production.

### Relation between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge on 3SG.s

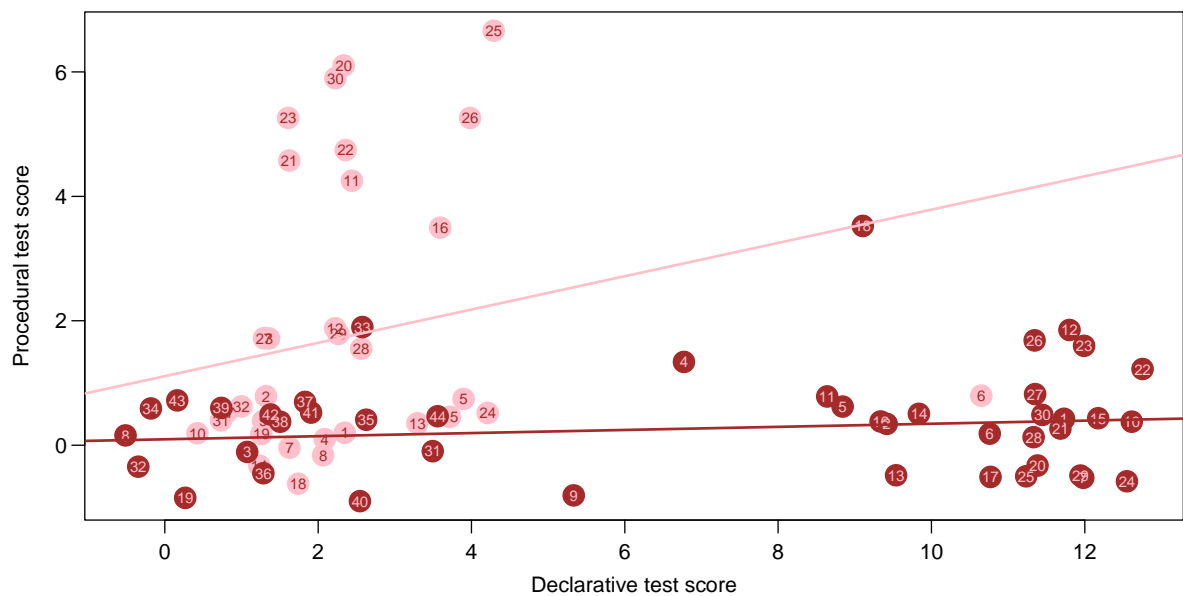


Figure 1: Relation between declarative and procedural knowledge in the two groups (Son, 2018, p.176)

Figure 1 shows the procedural and declarative test scores on 3 SG-s for the Vietnamese children (the dark circles) and the Swedish children (the light circles). The participant ID numbers are placed inside the circles. As demonstrated in the figure, the learners' cluster in three corners; the Swedish learners are found at the top left; high in procedural and low on declarative knowledge. The Vietnamese learners are in the bottom right corner; high on declarative and low on procedural knowledge. In the bottom left, we find children that score low on both declarative and procedural knowledge, both Swedish and Vietnamese learners.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrate differences between the L2 learners of English in Sweden and Vietnam. It is important to remember that the results only represent the classes and individual learners involved in the study. The Swedish learners have better procedural knowledge, and the Vietnamese learners have better declarative knowledge. As found in some classroom observations of English lessons in these two contexts (Son, 2018), there was the prevalence of the form practice on grammatical structures and vocabulary in two Vietnamese classrooms while two Swedish classrooms focused on meaning and communication in two Swedish classrooms. This is probably an effect of the teaching traditions; the communicative teaching situation promotes procedural knowledge, whereas grammatical teaching promotes declarative knowledge. This could also be due to the method of teaching- if teachers do not use metalanguage as is the case of communicative methods, the learners might not be able to

verbalize rules. Additionally, some learners in both groups gave incorrect explanations since they were confused between the number ending on nouns with the verb ending on the third-person singular present. The third-person singular present non-progressive *-s is* homophonous with plural *-s* (Goldschneider & DeKeyser, 2001). This is in line with earlier studies for Swedish learners (e.g. Källkvist & Petersson, 2006, Malmberg et al., 2000).

Additionally, there was no correlation between declarative and procedural knowledge of third-person singular *-s* in either group for young language learners, as was confirmed in previous studies (Ellis, 2008; Macrory & Stone, 2000; Seliger, 1979). When such a correlation has been found in earlier studies, it usually concerns adult learners and measures general proficiency (DeKeyser, 1995, 1997; DeGraaf, 1997; Green & Hecht, 1992; Goldschneider & DeKeyser, 2001; Gutierrez, 2017; Hulstijn & Hulstijn, 1984; Ellis, 2005, 2006, 2008; Robinson, 1996; Roehr & Gánem-Gutiérrez, 2009; see also Norris & Ortega, 2000). This has implications for teaching EFL to young learners. Declarative rules can be taught in a formal setting, not procedural knowledge. The practice and communication in the target language with high frequency and the exposure to the language may transform declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge. Declarative knowledge cannot serve as the basis for practice and proceduralization if it is at a low level.

There are no "miracle methods" in language teaching. It is necessary to consider the contexts of language learning for young learners and the tasks used by the teacher. If the tasks come as natural within the context and motivating atmosphere for young learners, this may affect acquisition and from conscious to unconscious. It is also essential to start from the level of language learners and keep in mind that there are many dimensions involved in language: linguistic, psychological, and social factors in language learning. Additionally, when making the lesson plan, the teacher should ask what the goal is in this lesson - Procedural or declarative knowledge? Nevertheless, linguistics features should be considered to be introduced as an operational base to promote communicative competence and make communication functional, as young language learners are not expected to analyze all grammatical rules. To facilitate the learning process of grammatical structures in the Vietnamese setting, one can use the inductive approach where the learners could make sense of grammatical features from being exposed to examples, contexts, and stories, as suggested by Nguyen (2021) and Tran et al. (2021). Most importantly, we do not stress language learners since language learning takes time. Young language learners might need to go through different learning stages and language learning processes from input to output; as German philosopher Alexander von Humboldt has said, 'A language cannot be taught. One can only create conditions for learning to take place.'

The data sample in the study is inevitably limited in scope. For further research, it would be interesting to undertake a longitudinal study in a larger sample size in order to see how different types of knowledge in both similar and different classroom settings are acquired.

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## Biodata

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## Improving Non-Majored Freshmen's Speaking Fluency in the E-learning Environment through the MS-Teams

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### ABSTRACT

Although online learning is a must in EFL teaching contexts nowadays, not all freshmen can make progress from it, especially in the English-speaking skills. Therefore, this study aims to explore freshmen's online learning difficulties in English speaking skills and find out the solutions. The study involved about 120 non-English majors at some universities, including Nong Lam University, Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City, Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh City University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnamese National University - School of Medicine, International University, and Van Lang University in answering a questionnaire.

The results showed that learning online does not bring more progress in English speaking skills than the offline learning mode. The results further indicated that although the students are familiar with the online learning mode, they still have problems during their learning, especially with their concentration and interaction. Findings are hoped to contribute to a better understanding of non-English majors' difficulties in the online environment.

Then, a solution of adopting Miro integrated into Microsoft Teams is suggested to partly help enhance the students- students' interaction to increase the students' progress in speaking skills when learning online.

**Keywords:** non-English majored, freshmen, online learning difficulties, EFL, interaction

### Introduction

Interaction has long been a key element in developing the students' fluency in English speaking skills. Language learners interact with each other to negotiate meanings (Long, 1981). Interactional, modified input can help language teaching and learning. (Namaziandost, Rahimi Esfahani, Nasri, & Mirshekaran, 2018; Wang & Castro, 2010). Thurmond (2003) defines types of interaction as "The learners' engagement with the course content, other learners, the instructor and the technological medium used in the course."

In the online teaching-learning environment, the interaction in speaking English among the students is limited. In the virtual learning environment, the students often type in the chat boxes to communicate so that the teacher can deliver the lesson uninterrupted. As a result, the speaking activities are not practiced sufficiently. Therefore, if the fluency level in the speaking skill is to be enhanced, there must be an increase in the classroom interaction in English, especially among students.

This study observes the effect of the correlation in the students' level and their learning online through MS-TEAMS on the development of the fluency in the students' English-speaking skills. Then, the suggestion of using MIRO integrated into MS-TEAMS is introduced to raise the students' English-speaking ability.

## Literature review

### *The influence of student's English background on their English learning*

High proficiency learners of English usually have a more positive attitude towards English learning than low proficiency ones (Huang & Tsai, 2003). There is a strong relationship between learners' English proficiency and their self-efficacy beliefs (Tilfarlioğlu & Cǧnkara, 2009). High proficiency learners believe they can understand the meaning of the language if they listen and read the English materials frequently, whereas low proficiency learners think they need translation to understand better English materials (Huang & Tsai, 2003). Also, low proficiency students cannot remember or generate all ideas in English, so teachers can even use L1 (their native language) to help generate ideas (Stapa & Majid, 2017).

Students with better English competence have more learning autonomy and vice versa (Dafei, 2007). One more difference is about English learning strategies, such as metacognitive, social, and cognitive strategies, which are used more often and more adequately by learners with high English proficiency than those with low levels (Kuama, 2016; Kunasaraphan, 2015; Wu, 2008). However, Razali, Xuan, and Samad (2018) showed that there was no difference in the use of language learning strategies between learners of lower English proficiency and upper English proficiency.

### *Online learning: Advantages- Disadvantages*

#### *Advantages:*

One advantage of online learning is its focus on the needs of individual learners rather than the instructors or the institutions' needs (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015). With online learning, learners study anytime and anywhere (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015). In addition, online learning brings fast access to instructors and peers in the online class (Fedynich, 2013). Students can even learn from other students in classrooms all over the world or consult with experts (Yuhanna, Alexander, & Kachik, 2020). The adoption of online learning has enabled faculty and learners to have easier access to electronic documents (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015; Yuhanna, Alexander, & Kachik, 2020). These days, the price of hardware, software, and internet service is affordable and decreasing (Yuhanna, Alexander, & Kachik, 2020). Besides, Unnisa (2014) showed the optimistic result that the use of new technology in online learning enhanced students' confidence. Another big advantage of online learning, as Nguyen & Tran (2021) pointed out, is that students can download and watch the recorded lecture video if they want to revise the lesson. This cannot be done in a traditional classroom.

### *Limitations / disadvantages:*

Online learning is feasible only when participants have computer literacy and online access (Fedynich, 2013, p.5). If students and instructors have insufficient digital competence, they are likely to fall behind when learning online (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). Online learning is a challenge for teachers to engage students and for students to keep their interest and motivation during lessons due to many distractions from family members, pets, or friends (Hulse, 2021). Besides, cyber classes lack instructor face time (Fedynich, 2013) and interaction (Ullah, Muhammad, & Bakhsh, 2020). There was a heavy workload in online classes (Fedynich, 2013; Ullah, Muhammad, & Bakhsh, 2020). Furthermore, learners cannot be assessed properly through online examination (Ullah, Muhammad, & Bakhsh, 2020) because there may be “piracy, plagiarism, cheating, inadequate selection skills, and inappropriate use of copy and paste” in e-learning (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015, p.36). E-learning may negatively improve learners' communication skills since they may not have adequate skills to express their knowledge (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015).

### *Students' autonomy*

“Autonomy in learning is immediately related to innovation, creativity and self-efficacy” (Serdyukova & Serdyukov, 2013). When students' autonomy has been increased, they can have greater success in online English learning (Dafei, 2007; Lee, Pate, & Cozart, 2015). In a study on university students by Baru, Tenggara, and Mataram (2020), online learning was favored in terms of developing autonomy in learning. Octaberlina and Afif (2021) support the opinion that learners' attitudes were a big contribution to their learning autonomy characteristics. In a study by Luu (2022), university students in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, just have a moderate level of readiness for online learning due to a lack of “self-directed learning ability” (p. 220). To develop autonomy and motivation for students, they need support and need satisfaction (Chen & Jang, 2010). Moreover, teachers should enhance learners' autonomy by giving them more responsibility, seeding good learning attitudes which suit each individual learner (Dafei, 2007). To fulfill those things, language teachers need to develop technological skills as well as their subject content to avoid being outdated in this new era (Bailly, 2010). Ribbe and Bezanilla (2013) recommended that teachers should try to create as authentic a learning environment as possible.

### *Students' Concentration and Interaction in online learning*

Students may be present in online classes but do not interact or participate actively or show interest in learning (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005). To improve speaking skills, students need to be engaged in interactive activities with the help of their teacher's input and feedback (Goh, 2006; Lear et al., 2010). Interaction in the form of feedback can help students improve their performance and feel more satisfied with the online course (Espasa & Menesses, 2010). Interaction and engagement can promote effective online teaching and learning (Le, 2021; Song et al., 2004). Another important thing to keep student concentration is that the online lesson should be student-centered (Croxtton, 2014; Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005). Moreover, interpolated tests should be used in online learning to reduce mind wandering among learners and increase notetaking among them (Szpunar, Moulton, & Schacter, 2013). There is a significant relationship between teaching styles and students' academic engagement (Shaari, Yusoff, Ghazali, Osman, & Dzahir, 2014). Courses with “text-based content, individualized learning, and limited interaction” are less favored by students than those more interactive

courses with the integration of multimedia (Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, & Stevens, 2012, p. 120). Technological tools used in online classes make great contributions to the interaction and concentration of students in lessons (Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2021).

### *Research Questions*

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey was seeking to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the effect of the correlation in the students' level and their online learning condition on the development of the fluency in the students' English-speaking skills?
2. To what extent is it possible to increase the students' English-speaking ability through online learning?

## **Methods**

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

The participants are non-English majored students at some universities in Vietnam, including Nong Lam University, Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City, Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh City University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnamese National University - School of Medicine, International University, and Van Lang University.

The students have just finished their high school's education. Although they have been pursuing different majors, they are all in their first year at university.

### *Design of the Study*

The study was quantitative research in which the simple random sampling scheme randomly sampled the participants.

### *Data collection & analysis*

The data is collected by means of an online form. It was collected once at the time the students were in their first English online course at university. Those data served as a means to know the students' current fluency level in the English-speaking skills in relation to their online learning conditions and their achievement.

## **Results/Findings and discussion**

*What is the effect of the correlation in the students' level and their online learning condition to the development of the fluency in the students' English-speaking skills?*

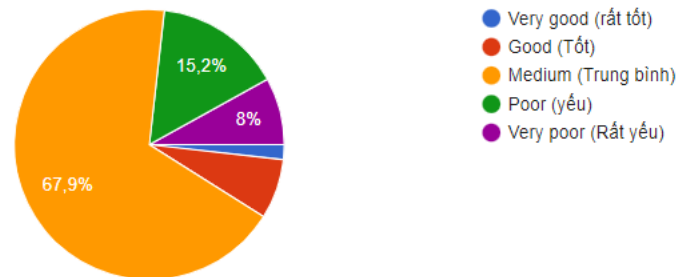
### *The students' English-speaking background*

### *The students' English level*

About the students' general English ability, the majority of them, about 67,9%, self-evaluate that they are in the medium level. More concernedly, about a quarter of the participants state that they possess the "poor" (5.2 %) or even "very poor" (8%) English ability.

1. What level of English do you think you are in? (bạn nghĩ khả năng tiếng Anh của bạn ở mức độ nào?)

112 câu trả lời



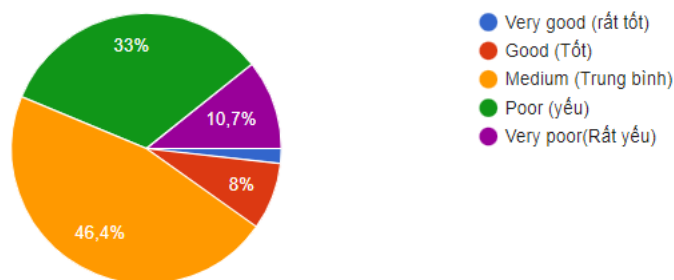
**Figure 1:** The students' English ability

### *The students' English-speaking level*

The pie chart shows that the number of students who are not confident with their English-speaking ability outweighs the ones in other English skills. Although the percentage of "medium" English Speaking skills is considerably lower (46.4 %) when compared with the general English skill (67.9 %) in the first pie chart, the percentage of "medium" level decreases because the percentage of "poor" English speaking skill increases. Besides, the "poor" English speaking skill (33 %) doubles the "poor" general English ability (15 %) in the first pie chart. Therefore, the data in the pie chart shows that fewer students are strong in their English-speaking skills.

2. What level of English speaking skill do you think you are in? (bạn nghĩ khả năng Nói tiếng Anh của bạn ở mức độ nào?)

112 câu trả lời



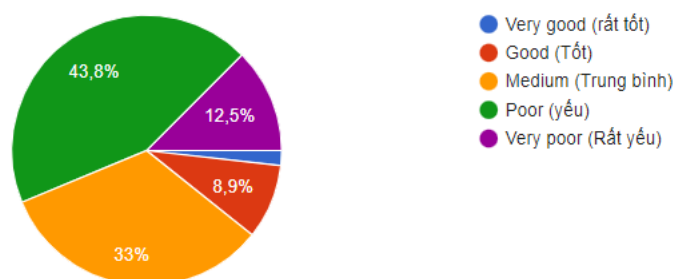
**Figure 2:** The student's English-speaking ability

*The students' fluency in the English-speaking skills*

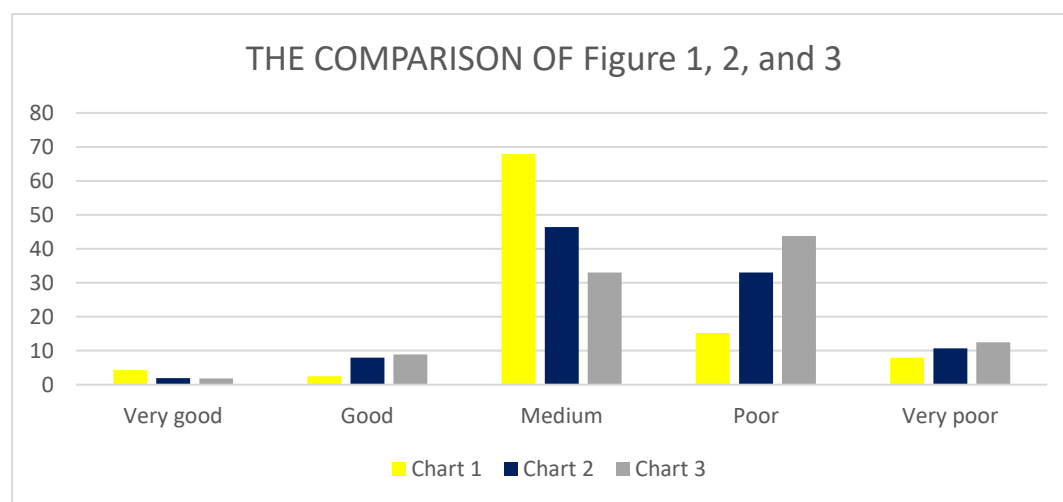
The third pie chart shows that more than half of the students are not fluent in their English-speaking skills. Firstly, most of them (43.8%) state that they are at the "poor" level of English-speaking skills. Moreover, 12.5% of the participants self-evaluated their fluency in the English-speaking skill as "very poor". Besides, as shown in Figure 3b, in comparison with the first and the second Figure, although the percentage of the "medium" level decreases noticeably, the percentage of the poor level in fluency in Figure 3 (43.8 %) is almost double the one in the general English-speaking skills (Figure 2) and three times higher than the same category in the general English-speaking skills (Figure 3a). Therefore, the data about the student's speaking fluency in Figures 3a and 3b, which is consistent with the data in Figures 1 and 2, shows the descending trend of the student's fluency in the English-speaking skills.

3. What level of FLUENCY in speaking English do you think you are in? (bạn nghĩ độ LƯU LOÁT trong kỹ năng Nói tiếng Anh của bạn ở mức độ nào?)

112 câu trả lời



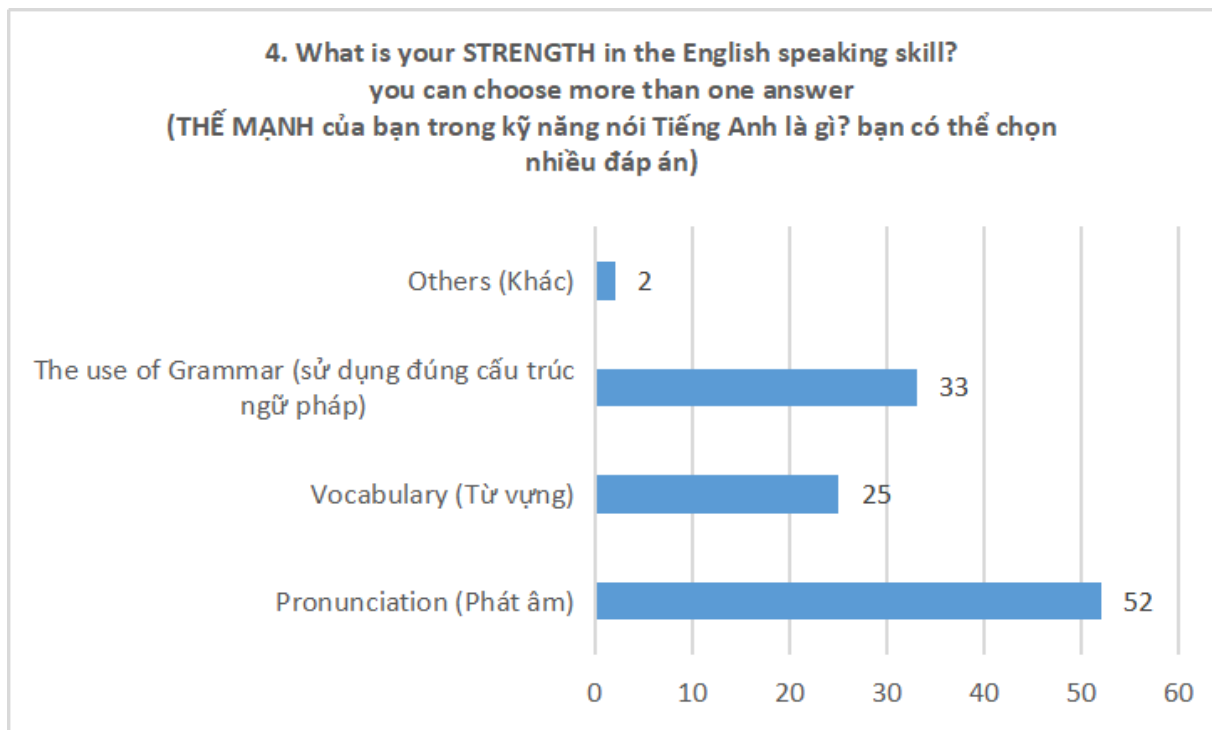
**Figure 3a:** The students' fluency in the English-speaking skills



**Figure 3b:** The students' fluency in the English-speaking skills

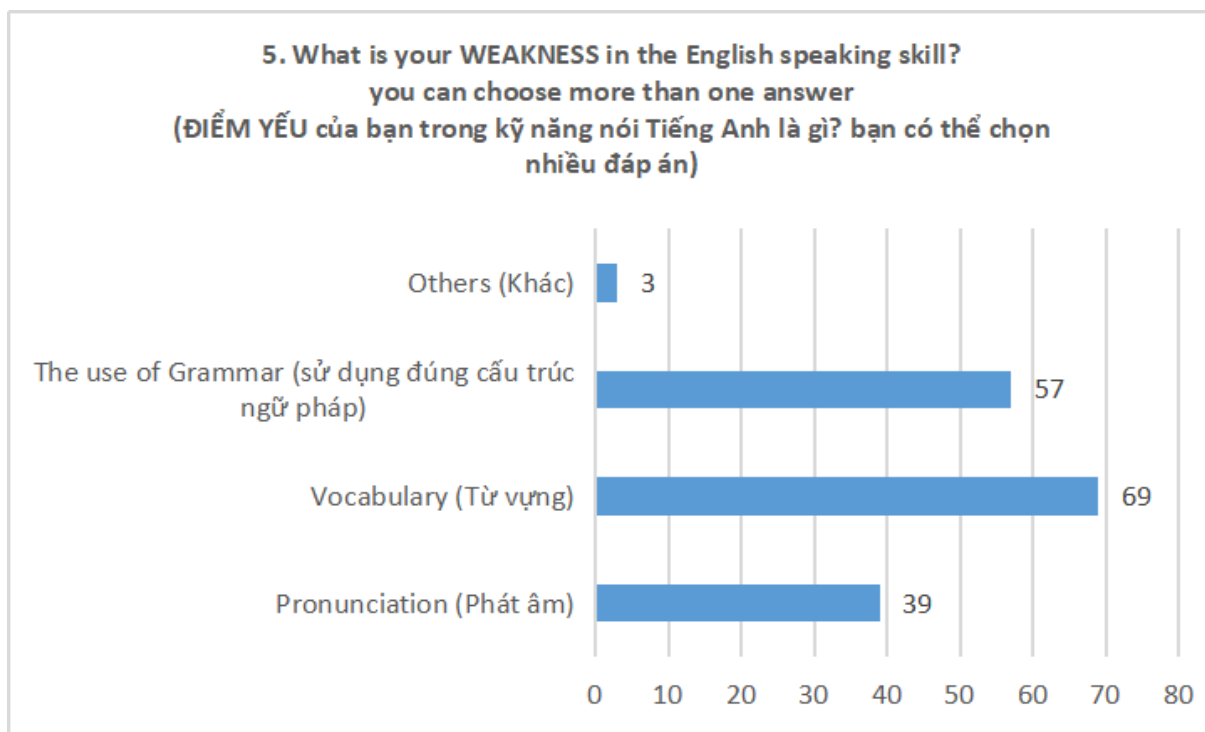
### *The student's strengths and weaknesses*

The data in Figures 4 and 5 show that the students have different strengths and weaknesses. Relating to their strength, about half of the students (46.4 %) state that they are better at pronunciation. Meanwhile, about 61.6 % of them admit that they have weaknesses with their vocabulary when speaking the English language. Besides, about the use of grammar in the English-speaking skills, it is regarded as the strength (29.5%) and the weakness (50.9%).



**Figure 4:** The students' strength





**Figure 5:** The students’ weaknesses

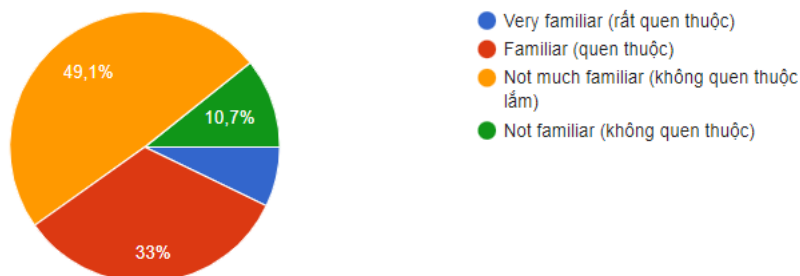
*The students’ conditions of learning online*

*The familiarity with learning online*

The data in Figure 6 shows that the students have different learning conditions. To begin with, the majority of the students are not much familiar with learning English in online classes (49.1 %). Besides, although there is about a third (33 %) of the students who admit that they are familiar with learning online, there is still about 10% of the students who state that they are not familiar with it. In this survey, the diversity of data shows that the students have different experiences with learning online and will obviously have various paces of their English achievement.

6. Are you familiar with learning English in online classes? (bạn có quen học Tiếng Anh online không?)

112 câu trả lời



**Figure 6:** The familiarity with learning online

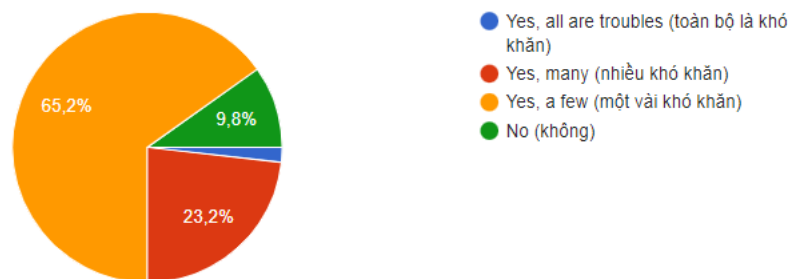
### *The troubles with learning online*

The troubles that the students face, the majority of which are not considerable, are about their English ability and the features of the online classes. To make it clearer, although the number of participants who are not familiar with learning online is high (49.1 %, as stated in Figure 6), it is surprising that 65.2 % of the students just have a few difficulties when learning online.

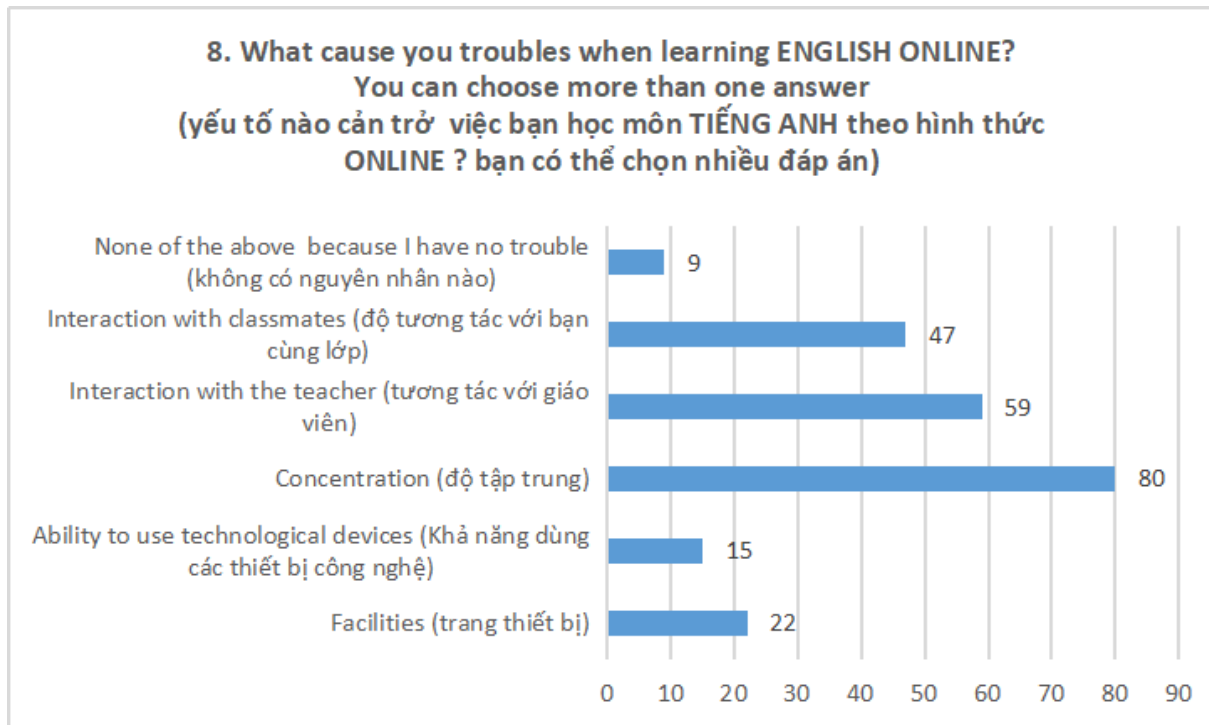
Moreover, the troubles the students face are mainly about their concentration (with the rate of 80 out of 112 students), interaction with the teacher (59 students), and interaction with their classmates (47 students), not much about technological devices and abilities (less than 20 %).

7. Do you have troubles when learning English online? (bạn có gặp khó khăn khi học ENGLISH online không?)

112 câu trả lời



**Figure 7: Troubles with online learning**

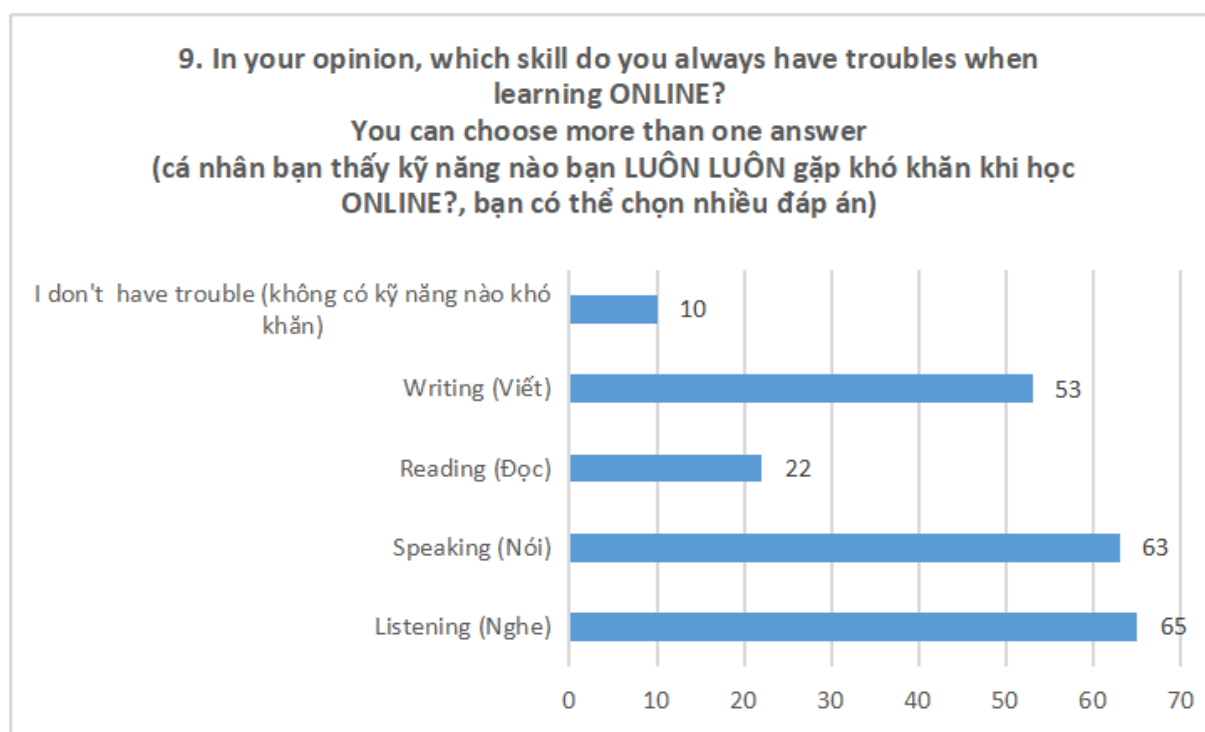


**Figure 8: The causes of troubles when learning online**

*The students' practicing the speaking skill online (in relation to the range of online speaking activities)*

*Troubles with the English skills when learning online*

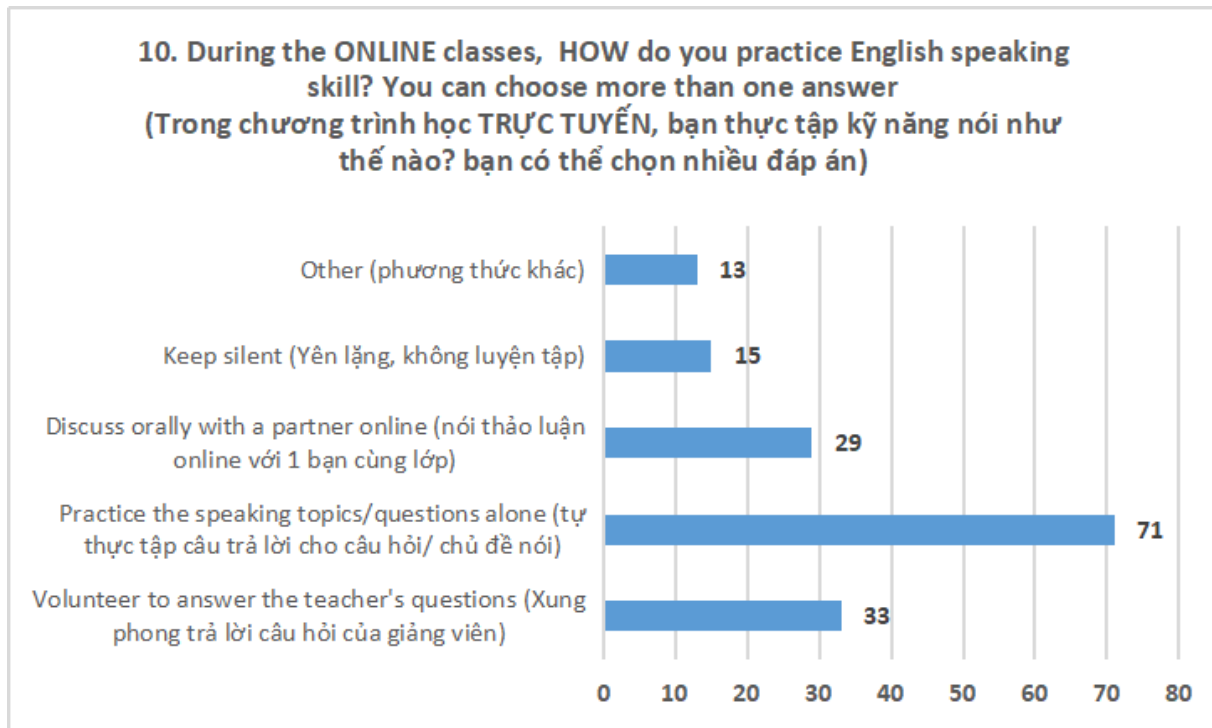
According to Figure 9, a large number of students always have trouble with learning English speaking skills online. To make it clearer, about 63 students (56.3%), the second-highest number in the chart, agree that they have trouble learning speaking skills online. Moreover, this percentage is almost the same as the highest one (about 65 students, 58 %). This is consistent with the data in the previous Figure (Figure 7) that the students' weakness is in the speaking skill, not with the technological issues.



**Figure 9: Troubles with the English skills when learning online**

*The way the speaking skill is practiced*

Apart from less than half of the students who volunteer to speak out the language and discuss orally with a partner online, the main way of practice is practicing alone (71 out of 112 students). Moreover, 13 out of 112 students choose to keep silent during their English speaking sessions. Despite the reasons for this silence, which can be because of the lack of interest in the speaking tasks, or the student's lack of confidence in voicing the language, this silence leads to the students' insufficiency in the practice time and obviously affects the students' fluency in the English-speaking skills.



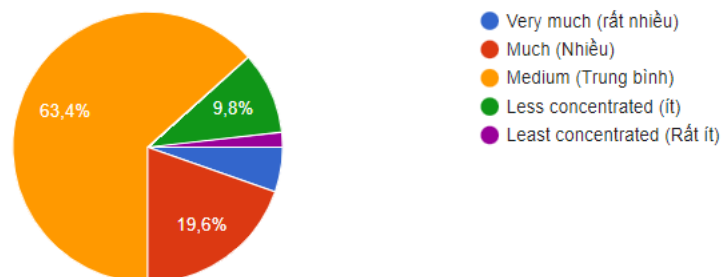
**Figure 10: The way the speaking skill is practiced**

*The students' concentration*

The pie chart shows that 63.4% of the participants concentrate at the medium level in practicing the speaking skill online. It is consistent with the data mentioned in Figure 8 that the most troublesome element affecting the students' learning online is their concentration. However, it is clear that there is an upward trend of their concentration as the percentage of "very concentrated" and "much concentrated" is much higher than the opposite side with "less concentrated" and "least concentrated". This trend partly shows the students' effort in their language learning.

11. How is your CONCENTRATION in learning the English speaking skill ONLINE ? (ĐỘ TẬP TRUNG của bạn như thế nào trong việc học kỹ năng nói TRỰC TUYẾN?)

112 câu trả lời



**Figure 11: The student's concentration**

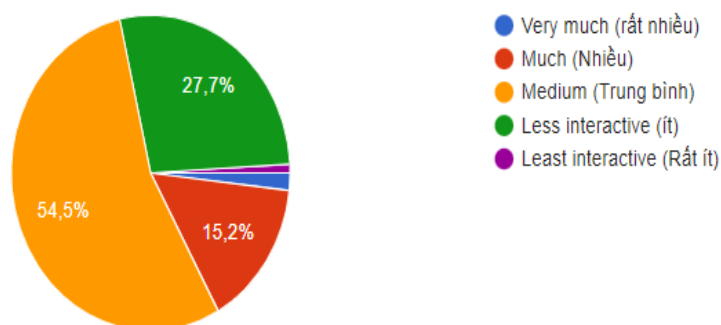
### *The students' interaction in the relationship with the speaking activities*

The data in Figure 12 and Figure 13 show a contradictory result. As in Figure 13, although the participants come from different colleges with different non-majored English teaching programs, the activities in which they are instructed to do are diverse (53.6 %), and quite diverse (29.5%). Moore (2011) thinks that classroom activities can engage students in learning activities, facilitate learning by doing, and practice communication skills. To put it another way, in this survey, a sufficient amount of speaking activities is supposed to boost the interaction in the English-speaking classes.

However, in this study, the ample number of speaking tasks can not do much to increase the students' interaction. The data in Figure 12 suggests that more than half of the students (54.5%) have medium interaction in their English learning. The second-largest group in this Figure (with 27.7 %) is "less interactive". It can be inferred that the students have certain obstacles in developing their English proficiency. According to Rivers, W. M. (1987), "Through interaction, students can increase their language store". In this study, this inadequate interaction is considered as an unavoidable result of the combination of the majority's medium English background (Figure 1-5), their trouble with the online learning environment (Figure 7-8-9), and their learning the speaking skill online (Figure 10).

12. How is your INTERACTION in learning the English speaking skill ONLINE? (ĐỘ TƯƠNG TÁC của bạn như thế nào trong việc học kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh TRỰC TUYẾN?)

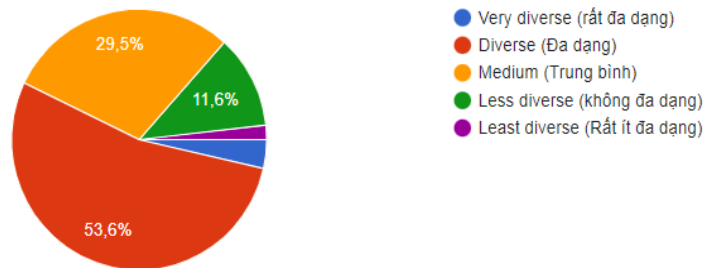
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**Figure 12: the students' interaction**

13. In your ONLINE curriculum, How do you feel about the English Speaking activities? (Trong chương trình học TRỰC TUYẾN, bạn thấy các hoạt động speaking như thế nào?)

112 câu trả lời



**Figure 13: The English speaking activities**

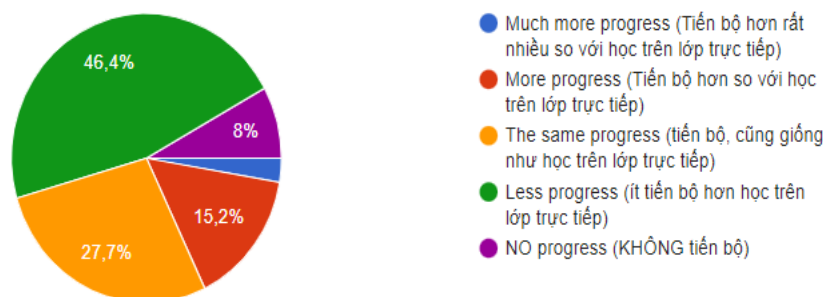
*To what extent can the student's fluency in English speaking ability during online learning be increased?*

#### *The students' improvement*

Learning English in online classes brings benefits to the minority of the students. Firstly, about 15.2% of the participants state that they have "much more progress" or "more progress" than when they learn English offline. Secondly, just 8 percent of the students report that they have "no progress", which can be due to the students' current poor language proficiency, not because of the learning environment (online or offline). Moreover, as shown in the pie chart, nearly half of the participants state that they achieve less progress when learning English in online classes than in offline classes. It is not to mention that the second-highest percentage in this pie chart is achieving "the same progress" as learning in the offline environment.

14. When compared to learning English in offline classes, does Learning English in ONLINE classes bring you MORE IMPROVEMENT? (nếu so sánh với việc học tiếng anh trực tiếp trên lớp, việc học tiếng anh ONLINE có làm bạn tiến bộ hơn không?)

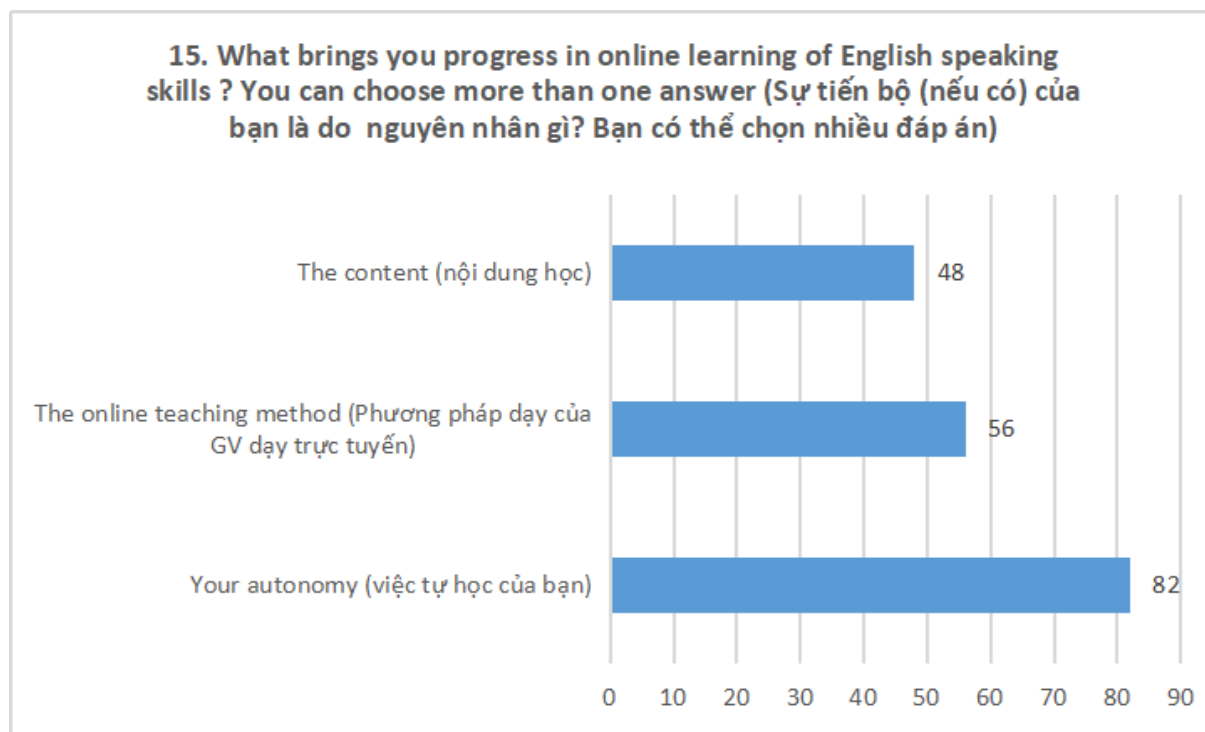
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**Figure 14: The students' improvement**

### *The reasons for the progress*

When being asked about the reasons for their progress, about 82 out of 112 students (73.2 %) agree that their autonomy is the main contributor to their improvement in their English speaking skills. This justifies that although the students' interaction level is majorly medium ( **Figure 12**), the majority of them have motivations in learning the speaking skill by trying to expose themselves in English ( self-practicing the speaking topics, volunteering to answer the questions in English) (Figure 10)



**Figure 15: The reasons for the progress**

### **Discussion & Suggestions**

About the students' English background, it can be seen that many students have trouble achieving fluency in English speaking skills. Firstly, the percentage of the poor level in speaking's fluency is high. Moreover, this percentage is almost double the one in the general English-speaking skills and three times higher than the same category in the general English skill. Therefore, it is inferred that the students' fluency in the English-speaking skills is the weak point of the majority of the participants. It is not to mention the fact that the participants come from many majors in different universities shows their different paces of acquisition. As Maleki, A., & Zangani, E. (2007) states that "English language proficiency is a good indicator and predictor of academic achievement for those students who are majoring in English (the EFL area)". The combination of different acquisition paces and troubles with the fluency in the speaking skill makes online learning and teaching more complex.

Questions asking about the students' condition of learning online show that although the majority of the students are not familiar with learning online, once learning in that mode, they just have a few difficulties. Not relating much to the technological issues, obstacles are mainly about the online learning environment. In other words, they have trouble with interaction with their teacher and among themselves. They also have difficulties concentrating on the lessons.

The variety of the speaking activities in the class does not enhance the students much. It is shown by the way the students choose to practice the speaking skill- a concerning number of the students choose to practice the speaking task alone. That main mode of practicing the speaking skills among the participants can lead to various problems. As the students' self-practice, they, especially the low-level students, cannot self-correct their mistakes in the use of grammar, word choices, pronunciation, etc. This will be hard for them to move to the next level of progress. As a result, the poor students are getting more and more silent and less interactive in the lessons.

The students' improvement, if possible, is mainly through their autonomy. It means that the online learning environment does not help much in their fluency in English speaking skills. That is why it is suggested that the learners should be given more freedom and scopes to interact in the E-learning environment.

Findings partly help to understand the effect of the relationship between the students' level and their online learning condition on the students' improvement. Because students have different paces of learning and various weaknesses in their English-speaking fluency, instructors should pay attention to those characteristics so that they can give suitable teaching methods to different groups of students in their online teaching. Among the solutions, grouping the students to different language abilities also helps decrease the variety in language ability.

Findings also suggest that teachers should find ways to maximize the student's concentration and interactions with their students as well as the one among the students. However, because the diversity of classroom activities does not help much in increasing the concentration and interactions as mentioned above and the students' progress mainly comes from their autonomy, teachers should focus on ways increasing the students' self-learning, helping them consciously increase their interaction (with their teacher and peers), and consequently increase their concentration while interacting.

In offline classes, teachers usually elicit students' responses by calling on them to answer questions to encourage interaction and concentration. This method, however, is only limited to some specific students and cannot cover the whole class. As Moorhouse and Kohnke (2020) recommended, one way to facilitate interactions in language classrooms is through response cards. Response cards are cards on which students write their answers and then hold up to display. According to Twyman and Heward (2018), response cards effectively increase participation and improve learning outcomes for students at all levels. Nevertheless, in Microsoft Teams online classes, eliciting and managing students' responses is challenging because interactions can only be carried out through webcams and microphones. It is not feasible to ask all students to turn on their webcams and microphones simultaneously. With Microsoft Teams, students can type in their answers in the chatbox, but it takes a lot of time and effort to check all of their responses. This issue can be solved by applying Student Response Systems (SRS) such as Mentimeter, Kahoot, etc., which provide a better and more flexible way



for students to respond using their electronic devices. Those platforms, however, can only facilitate interactions between teachers and students and are unhelpful for peer interactions.

A better way to organize pair work and group work, as well as enhance interaction between teacher – students and students with each other, is through MIRO, a visual collaboration platform that can be integrated into Microsoft Teams. MIRO allows users to collaborate and share ideas with each other as if they were in the same room. MIRO provides users with a board that both teacher and students can see, edit, and add information in a classroom context. With MIRO, teachers can upload notes, videos, images, or tasks onto a board and invite students to interact and collaborate with each other. In this way, MIRO can help facilitate interaction between teacher – students and between students with each other and students with the lesson content. Therefore, with a wide range of features and functionalities, MIRO can be an effective tool for language teachers to enhance the student's speaking skills when learning online.

### *Potential benefits of MIRO in Online Language Classrooms*

In MIRO, teachers can sign up for a free account, create a virtual board and add various features such as text, sticky notes, mind maps, YouTube videos, or links to external websites. The board can be shared directly with students via a link which can be provided by clicking on the "Invite members" on the top right corner. The students, then, can also edit the content on the board under the teacher's supervision.

There are some potential pedagogical benefits of applying MIRO in language classrooms to enhance interaction and concentration, as well as to improve speaking skills.

Firstly, as MIRO is an excellent tool for brainstorming ideas, it can be used to elicit students' opinions about a specific topic as a warm-up activity before a speaking task. Based on students' responses, teachers can structure the lesson content according to students' previous knowledge and interests in order to enhance their engagement. For example, teachers can ask an open-ended question and allow students to add their ideas in the form of post-it notes to the board.

Secondly, MIRO can be useful in evaluating students' concentration and attitude during class. As it is hard to keep students' attention during an online lesson, the teacher can create a warmer activity to liven up and increase energy after each section of a lesson. For instance, the teacher can ask students to use an emoji or write a short sentence to show their feelings and expectations. This not only draws students' attention back to the lesson but is also useful in helping the teacher find out whether the students are paying attention to the lesson. Besides, at the end of the class, the platform can be used to collect students' questions and expectations about the lesson content.

Thirdly, MIRO is also useful for group work activities. Teachers can create several frames and divide the class into smaller groups. Each group will be then assigned to a frame as their own working space. For example, the groups are asked to collect information about a specific topic. Each group member will work together and post what they can find (videos, images, text, links to websites, etc.) in their own group's working area on the board. Teachers can check all the groups' progress in real-time and provide assistance if necessary. Besides, after completion, the students can also see other groups' works, like in a gallery. They can also comment and discuss directly on the board.

In addition, MIRO can also be used for individual work. Students can create their own MIRO boards and use them as digital workbooks with each frame for an assignment. Students can add

text or upload videos of their oral assignments and share them with their teachers for feedback. Since the students will use the board for the whole semester, the teachers can encourage students to respond to the feedback and edit the assignments according to students' abilities and track their progress easily.

One potential limitation of MIRO is that a free account can allow teachers to create up to 3 interactive boards. Besides, some features such as voting, video chat, and timer will also be unavailable. However, with various features and an intuitive interface, MIRO can be an efficient tool for improving speaking skills in online language classrooms.

## Conclusion

When being taught the speaking skill in the online environment with the support of MIRO integrated with MS-Teams, non-majored students will have better interaction with their peers and, consequently, greater learning motivation and concentration, even with big-sized classes. The students' fluency in their speaking performance will be enhanced by improving those.

However, further research should be carried out to find out how to improve the students' speaking fluency by improving the students' mistake self-correction via the use of MS-Team because mistake self-correction will support the interaction.

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## Biodata

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## Complexity and Interaction across Oral, Written and Online Discourse

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### ABSTRACT

Most research that observed online discussions compared them to either written (e.g., Hewing & Coffin, 2007) or oral discourse (e.g., Joiner et al., 2008), never compiling the three modalities, and they did not provide comprehensive results regarding both form and Interaction. Academic essays and oral debates have been widely consumed in the EAP classroom. However, the effectiveness of synchronous online forums in the EFL academic classroom and their discourse features need to be compared to oral and written academic tasks simultaneously through a comprehensive analysis of both complexity, accuracy, and Interaction. The present study investigated the use of complex syntax, grammatical accuracy, and Interaction in the argumentative discourse of academic essays, oral debates, and synchronous online forums of EFL undergraduate students ( $N= 54$ ) enrolled in a 12-week module of English for academic purposes. The methodology encompassed qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. All data were qualitatively transcribed and coded. Then results were quantitatively calculated using ANOVA and post hoc t-tests to find the differences across tasks for each variable. Results revealed a higher impact of academic essays and synchronous online forums on syntactic complexity and grammatical accuracy than oral debates and a greater influence of online forums and oral debates than academic essays on interactional features. Synchronous online forums revealed the highest impact as a task combining both structure and Interaction. Pedagogical implications then highlighted how synchronous online forums could be used in the rhetoric and composition EFL classroom

#### Keywords:

Interaction, Syntactic Complexity, Academic writing, Oral Debates, Synchronous Online Forums

### Introduction

The Online forum has been widely used in distant and blended courses (Bates, 2019; Gamage et al., 2022). The present study aims at exploring the distinguishing discourse features of online forums, face-to-face oral debates, and academic essays in order to set a continuum determining the position of synchronous online forums compared to oral and written modalities in the academic context of English as a foreign language. Moreover, there are still a lot of arguments concerning

its efficiency in the use of English for academic purposes (e.g., Fu et al., 2016). Online discussions were usually compared to only one written or oral modality but never with both oral and written modalities under the same contextual features. Furthermore, most of the investigations focused on Interaction (Shakarami et al., 2016) and knowledge construction (Duvall et al., 2020; Shukor et al., 2014) rather than both Interaction and form focusing on syntactic complexity and grammatical accuracy, which are major factors in the development of the EFL learner (Pienemann, 1998) and hence the influence of a classroom task. Most of the previous research observed online forums as an asynchronous task though synchronicity is one important feature of oral debates or face-to-face discussions (Bates, 2019). Therefore, it is vital to explore the efficiency of synchronous online forums academically compared to other academic oral and written tasks. Complex syntactic structures, grammatical accuracy, and Interaction were analyzed to locate online forums on a continuum between oral and written academic discourse. The form was investigated via a cognitive analysis of complex syntax in the three investigated tasks, whereas Interaction was investigated via the functional approach, metadiscourse strategies, and engagement markers (Hyland, 2005).

Cognitive (e.g., Pienemann, 1998) and functional linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) are two major approaches that have raised a lot of arguments and greatly influenced the analysis of discourse. They are contradictory in their focus of analysis. In cognitive linguistics, form is the main concern and the major indication of language acquisition development, while in functional grammar, the function of form in discourse/ the text is of more concern. Nevertheless, in this study, both approaches are considered complementary for revealing results on both cognitively complex syntactic and interactional features used by EFL learners in discourse across three tasks with three different modalities. English is categorized by Thompson (1978) as a grammatically word order language (GWO) that relies on the grammatical function of word order rather than the pragmatic function. Pienemann (1998) and Clahsen (1984) found that complex syntax and the use of subordinate clauses is the last stage to be cognitively acquired by ESL learners. Accordingly, subordination and complex syntax should be the most significant feature to be highlighted in academic ESL/EFL tasks. Interaction, nevertheless, was of high concern to most research comparing online and face-to-face discussions as well as online and academic writing (Hewing & Coffin, 2007; Joiner et al., 2008). The cognitive approach of analysis influenced the focus of the study on syntactic complexity and grammatical accuracy, while functional analysis influenced the analysis of interactional discourse in the form of engagement markers. Thus, this study used both cognitive and functional approaches of analysis to explore similarities and differences in both form and Interaction via rhetorical discourse across online forums, oral debates, and academic essays of EFL undergraduate students.

## **Theoretical Background**

### *Cognitive processing approach*

Syntactic complexity measured through subordination and density of clauses is a significant indicator of cognitive development among native speakers (Nippold et al., 2020) and higher proficiency levels among second language learners (Tan & Dang, 2022; Zaki, 2011). Moreover, syntactic complexity is also observed as a measurement of language formality in various genres and learning tasks, especially in the academic context (e.g., Nippold et al., 2017; Nippold et al., 2020). Academic writing and critical thinking tasks highly promoted the use of complex syntax



(Jin et al., 2020; Nippold et al., 2020). Being such a measurement of linguistic development relies on major cognitive processing models that determine a hierarchy of developmental features of second language structures (Clahsen, 1984; Pienemann, 1998). Each stage is determined by the first emergence of a new, more complex linguistic structure in the oral performance of the second language speaker disregarding the accuracy of usage. Thus, the first appearance, rather than accuracy of usage, of a linguistic structure in the production of the second language learner determines a new developmental stage on a hierarchy of grammatical structures (Clahsen, 1984; Pienemann, 1998). The oral production of a grammatical feature indicates that the learner is cognitively processed and fully acquired.

Clahsen (1984) proposed the Multidimensional Model, claiming that producing more complex structures is positively correlated with higher cognitive processing. Pienemann (1998) proposed the Processability Theory (PT) with six sequential stages for the second language learner's grammatical development. The highest cognitively processed structure in both was the ability to produce embedded clauses in oral production. These stages are illustrated by Pienemann (as cited in Braid, 1999) as follows:

1. Word (Words)
2. Category procedure (Lexical morphemes)
3. Phrasal procedure (Phrasal informational exchange)
4. Grammatical function (Inter-phrasal information exchange)
5. Sentence procedure (Inter-phrasal information exchange)
6. Sub-clause procedure (Main and subordinate clauses)

According to processing theories, the production of a subordinate clause is the most advanced acquired grammatical structure in second language learners. A dependent clause is embedded in the main clause to function as an adverbial, adjectival, or a complement such as a noun or a verb complement. It can occur in a finite or a non-finite form. A Finite subordinate clause clearly marks tense and modality, while a non-finite subordinate clause can mark aspect and voice (Biber & Gray, 2016) and is formed of the infinitive, the gerundive, and the participial (Nippold et al., 2017). In the current study, finite and infinite subordinate clauses will be observed in the three academic modality tasks for both quantity and grammatical accuracy in order to evaluate the most cognitively influential task for EFL students and the most promoting task of complex syntactic structures, exploring as well the variation amongst oral, written and multimodal second language discourse in the academic context.

### *Functional Analysis*

According to Halliday (1994) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), systematic functional analysis focuses on three integrated metafunctions for the linguistic tokens used in any utterance or text, namely: ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. An ideational function is relevant to the propositional content or ideas and experiences represented by the language used, whereas the interpersonal function of language shows how it is manipulated to enhance Interaction and engagement among the author, reader, and text. The third function is relevant to how language organizes and unites the text coherently.

Similarly, Metadiscourse is defined by Hyland (2005, p.27) as “the way writers engage their readers and create convincing and coherent text...it is about interaction in text”. Lexical variables such as evaluative lexis and stance markers may reveal the writer's attitude, emotions, and reactions towards a proposition. Bagheri& Zenouzagh (2021) observed various engagement discourses highlighting EFL learners' attitudes and engagement in face-to-face and online speaking modalities. Metacognitive verbs were observed as a criterion for higher critical thinking abilities in adolescent students (Nippold et al., 2020). Thus, in the current investigation, Interaction was a construct of significant concern that was observed through engagement markers involving personal expressions of stance, personal pronouns, commands, questions, and concessions in the argumentative discourse of EFL learners.

## Literature Review

### *Syntactic complexity in online forums*

The research highlighted a positive correlation between the production of complex syntax and language proficiency scores (Tan& Dang, 2022) in IELTS writing task 2, where scores above band 6 included dependent clauses in 74.2% of the total number of sentences while scores below 6 showed 56.2% of the total number of sentences. Argumentative writing in particular, promoted syntactic complexity in English learners (Nippold et al., 2020; Jin et al., 2020). Adolescent age groups of both 13 and 16 years old writing their opinion agreeing or disagreeing with the moral messages of fables produced high levels of syntactic complexity due to the critical thinking nature of the task (Nippold et al., 2020). Similarly, argumentative essays comprised higher levels of syntactic complexity than face-to-face oral discussions in EFL students who focused on linguistic complexity during the writing process (Jin et al., 2020) and in native speakers' discourse (Biber& Gray, 2016). Moreover, academic writing is usually related to the use of complex syntax and embedded clauses (Biber& Gray, 2016; Fang, 2021). Comparing oral discussions across the face-to-face and online modalities, EFL students, were found to focus more on syntax in the online modality than in face-to-face discussions where they focused on engagement markers (Bagheri& Zenouzagh, 2021). Though relatively plenty of studies have investigated online discussions in education (e.g., Costley& Lange, 2016; Fu et al., 2016), they all focused on their influence on students' knowledge construction and critical thinking more than the impact these discussions have on fluency, proficiency level, and grammatical accuracy. Very few studies examined the relationship between online discussions and syntactic complexity (Montero-Fleta et al., 2009; Pyun, 2003; Sotillo, 2000). In observation of online and face-to-face discussions, Pyun (2003) found that non-native speakers of English produced more error-free utterances in online discussions than in face-to-face discussions signifying a higher grammatical accuracy, without any variance in syntactic complexity, though. A Further investigation highlighted a richer command of error-free utterances in synchronous online forums than asynchronous ones (Sotilla, 2000) and an impact of the topic on syntactic complexity since political forums comprised longer sentences than football forums (Montero-Fleta et al., 2009). In order, hence, to explore the variation amongst online oral, and written academic tasks, both syntactic complexity, and grammatical accuracy should be scrutinized through a variety of topic discussions. Thus, this study will observe finite and non-finite subordinate clauses for syntactic complexity and error-free utterances for grammatical accuracy in the three academic tasks: essays, online forums, and oral debates to compare the effect of each task on EFL learners' language formality and promotion of cognitively higher complex structures.

### *Engagement in online discussions*

Online forums own many of the traits that lead to students' satisfaction, such as the involvement in the university online system, the need for critical thinking and knowledge building skills, and the context of communicating with their class community (Tran et al., 2022). Students' engagement in online forums is further reinforced through knowledge construction tasks and complex argumentation (Duvall et al., 2020; Fu et al., 2016). Duvall et al. (2020) state that designing highly interactive online discussions requires argumentation that stimulates posts of negotiation, criticizing, and reasoning. Online discussions are a flexible context for complex argumentation that urges the participants to reveal a high level of Interaction through negotiations, justification, asking questions, and commenting on remarks, in addition to providing elaboration and evidence for their claims (Fu et al., 2016, Stegmann et al. 2012, Shukor et al., 2014) leading to more constructive discussions (Potter, 2008). In an attempt to find a pattern of the structure of interactions used by native and non-native Spanish students of the English translation, Fernandez-Polo & Cal-Varela (2018) found that criticism and suggesting improvement was the major component of 100% of the posts that were introduced by other peripheral interactions such salutation, praise, thanking and followed by farewell and signature for the sake of mitigating criticism. It was also clear that online forums instigated more polite discourse by EFL students than native speakers. Praise was a form of concession as the student expressed agreement on the quality of the work exposed in the main post. Concession as a mitigation strategy in the argument will be one significant variable to be observed in this study. Shukor et al. (2014) examined students' strategies and cognitive level in online discussions through observing three cognitive categories: Asking questions, giving answers, and giving information through either agreement or disagreement. Each cognitive category was graded from high (H) to low (L), from just providing a question, an answer, or information to providing them with elaboration and explanation. Findings showed that the higher cognitive groups (H) and (HL) showed a sequence of giving information with elaboration and commenting on a previous remark, accepting another opinion (concessions), and in disagreement asking questions that require elaboration as a rebuttal. The Lower cognitive group (L) did not use acceptance and non-acceptance of information. They tended to answer without elaboration. In the current study, concessions, personal expressions of stance, and questions in arguments will be observed as interactional features relevant to the task's influence on the use of mitigation strategies, argumentation, critical thinking, and high cognitive skills. Online forums assimilated face-to-face discussions in revealing a turn-taking sequence of question responses in students' discourse (Gibson, 2009). Whereas, similar to multimodal writing, in online forums, learners could easily copy quotes from previous posts and employ multimodal tools such as colors, italics, and bold font to highlight important information (Gibson, 2009), turning multimodality tools, thus, into a means of Interaction in discourse.

These investigations highlight the vitality of employing online forums in academic English and critical thinking education as an effective tool. However, its effectiveness and level of Interaction should be compared to other popular academic oral and written modalities.

### *Oral versus written discourse*

Biber & Gray (2016) explained that academic writing relies on explicitly delivered meaning due to the lack of common context between the author and the reader, as is the case between the speaker and the interlocutor in conversation. The speaker can use pronouns, ellipsis, and expressions that can have no meaning outside of the situation. On the other hand, academic writing relies on the

elaboration of meaning, leading to the addition of further embedded clauses to simple clauses such as finite clauses and non-finite clauses and even phrases, producing, therefore, more grammatically complex structures than that of conversational discourse. Moreover, academic writing is described as objective that lacks reference to first and second personal pronouns with a more focus on abstract vocabulary (Fang, 2021).

In a blended learning course, Jin et al. (2020) observed students' argumentative discourse through face-to-face discussions and collaboratively written essays. Results showed that students focused on content, evidence, reasons, and claim extraction in the face-to-face discussions, which also promoted rebuttals and negotiations aiming at reaching an agreement on a claim; whereas, the essay enhanced the use of formal advanced linguistic features via the use of syntactic complexity and advanced vocabulary. In summary, oral discussions promoted higher Interaction, whereas academic essays enhanced syntactic complexity. The same constructs were observed via syntactic complexity and metacognitive verbs (i.e., think, believe) as a measurement of development in critical thinking writing by two groups of adolescents in Nippold et al. (2020). Findings revealed that critical thinking writing reinforced the production of complex syntax and metacognitive verbs even in the lower age group. In the current study, metacognitive verbs are relevant to Personal Expressions of Stance as a variable of Interaction.

In Kashiha (2021), stance expressions and their communicative functions were also scrutinized in monologic and dialogic forms of oral academic discourse through a comparison of debates and seminars of native speakers' corpus. Results revealed a higher frequency of stance expressions self-mention. The verb 'agree' is as an attitude marker in debates than in seminars due to the dialogic nature of debates where the speaker needed to have clear, frequent justifications and evaluations of their claims and rebuttals. The speaker used 'I' to confirm their voice and identity in the argument, whereas attitude markers were the least used in both tasks with a relatively higher frequency in seminars. Hedges were frequently used in both tasks with a higher percentage in monologic seminars than in debates due to the sensitivity of seminars to the reliability of academic information; the speakers were sensitive to saying information as facts. They used 'I think' for hedges to involve the audience. Boosters were equal in the tasks, and they included adverbs, verbs, modal auxiliaries, and prepositional phrases such as "obviously", "definitely", "should surely" (p. 6). Since the academic debate is a major task in the present study, stance expressions, personal pronouns as self-mention, and concessions are also considered significant engagement markers in the comparison under investigation.

In a sensitive observation of the influence of online modality, oral discussions were compared in both faces to face and online modalities (Bagheri& Zenouzagh, 2021) through categorizing engagement into limited and elaborate where elaborate engagement involved higher fluency, more engagement discourse, involvement in the talk, and rebuttals in contrast to limited engagement which involved silence, uncertainty, use of L1, and asking for help. Results indicated that students paid more attention to complex syntax, engagement discourse, and arguments in online conversations, while face-to-face discussions reinforced elaborate engagement more than online speaking conversations regarding fluency, actual talk, and student satisfaction. Though online conversation is an oral task, the online mode enhanced the use of complexity more than the face-to-face modality, which raises questions about students' performance and engagement in online discussions in their written form compared to oral debates.

The features of oral and written discourse are influenced, hence, by genre (Nippold et al., 2020), formality and monologic versus dialogic nature (Jin et al., 2020; Kashiha; 2021), synchronization, and new means of multimodal communication (Bagheri& Zenouzagh, 2021). Synchronous online forums have a writing mode and have the same pace of writing that leads to integration of ideas in spite of its inclusion of direct contact with the audience, involvement of the student, and some degree of spontaneity like oral discourse. The academic debate is an oral conversation that is influenced by the formal academic context, and the essay is a monologic task. Significant factors will definitely guide students to a rich production of variant interactional and formal discourse features.

### *Design of online discussions*

Online discussions provide students with more think time in addition to the ability to reply without any interruption as face-to-face discussions. There is always a chance to review and analyze other posts before replying, in addition to the stimulation of a bigger amount of discourse than timed face-to-face discussions (Ward et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2014). Furthermore, many studies argued that online discussions stimulate higher-order thinking than face-to-face discussions (Bates, 2019; Burgess, 2009; Guan et al., 2006). “Electronic discussion(s) provide a natural framework for teaching critical thinking because it captures the best of both traditional writing assignments as well as in-class discussions” (Greenlaw & DeLoach, 2003, p. 36). They are considered a highly convenient context for academic discourse, critical analysis, and reflection (Stansberry, 2006). The design of the discussions highly influences the quality and quantity of students’ posts. According to DeLoach and Greenlaw (2007), the prompt of the discussion should direct students' attention to the main points of the task or opinion of the argument, such as asking, "there are three sides to this argument- A,B and C. What would you say about it if you agreed with A? B? C?" (P.424). It should include a strong argument that reinforces negotiation, elaboration, evidence, and criticism (Duvall et al., 2020). According to Jeong (2004), online discussions for students should include a topic that stimulates various points of view and arguments of two opposite sides since conflicting opinions lead to a higher level of critical thinking. The structure of an online discussion in class should include "prompts that involve real-world problems" (Hall, 2015, p.25) rather than closed questions in order to provoke higher critical thinking skills. Moreover, the discussion should be highly structured regarding its setting. Students should be assigned a position in the arguments, and their posts should be evaluated according to clear criteria or rubric (Jeong, 2004). And low participation of the instructor is important to create more space for learner-learner interaction (Duvall et al., 2020). Finally, it is recommended that the class is divided into smaller groups. This study followed such structured discussions as the prompts included real-life arguments, with a clear assignment of each student's position in the argument. The class was divided into smaller groups of four to six members each. And clear criteria were written in the prompt requiring students to write two posts, not less than six lines each, one post to clarify their position and another to reply to one of the group members' posts.

### *Moodle as a learning management system*

Moodle is a “course management system” (Coskun & Arslan, 2014, p. 275) that allows educators to create online platforms that can cater to the needs of teachers and learners regarding the development of assessments, quizzes, interactive activities, forums, chats, writing and listening assignments, databases, and glossaries (Ali & Jaafar, 2010). Moodle mainly stands for “Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment”(Coskun & Arslan, 2014, p. 275). Moodle

provides two modules of written communication, namely chat and forums. They are used for synchronous and asynchronous online discussions. With the remarkable increase in using state-of-the-art technology in foreign language courses, together with the focus on knowledge construction and the link between academic performance and language skills, plenty of educational institutions across the globe have resorted to e-learning methods and solutions. One of these methods is provided by Moodle via forums as they reinforce "text-based collaborative dialogue" and "collaborative construction of knowledge" (Coskun & Arslan, 2014, p. 276). Research, moreover, supported the benefit of Moodle's online fora in teaching English for academic writing as the students thought that the fora were user-friendly, convenient regarding time and place, and enhanced Interaction (Jun & Lee, 2012). It is argued that students who use online environments are more independent and better improve their language, communication, and social skills than students in traditional classes (Coskun & Arslan, 2014).

In summary, the concern of previous research with comparing only two modalities at a time, either written and oral (e.g., Jin et al., 2020), written and multimodal (e.g., Hewing & Coffin, 2007), or oral and multimodal (e.g., Bagheri & Zenouzagh, 2021; Joiner et al., 2008) urged the need to conduct a more comprehensive investigation of all three modalities, written, oral and multimodal via the same context. Moreover, most of the studies focused only on Interaction (e.g., Fernandez-Polo & Cal-Varela, 2018; Kashiha, 2021) and knowledge construction (e.g., Costley & Lange, 2016) rather than observing both syntax and Interaction, very few studies (e.g., Nippold et al., 2020; Montero-Fleta et al., 2009) however, observed both syntactic structure and Interaction in only one or two tasks though.

### *Constructs and variables*

Three major categories were analyzed in the present study in order to reflect differences in sentence structure and Interaction amongst the different examined tasks. They are syntactic complexity, grammatical accuracy, and Interaction.

**Syntactic complexity** is the ability of human beings to combine already acquired structures in order to form longer and multi-embedded utterances (Nippold et al., 2007, p. 179). Operationally, it is measured via the observation of three variables: subordinate clauses; finite subordinate clauses; non-finite subordinate clauses

**Grammatical accuracy** is the production of sentences that do not include any violations for the syntactic and morphological rules of the target language. Operationally, it is determined by the percentage of error-free utterances to a total number of utterances per text (Lee, 2004; Zaki, 2011). Three variables were scrutinized: Error-Free Utterances; Error-free utterances with a complex clause; Error-free utterances with a simple clause

**Interaction** is the means of communication between the author and the audience or the readers for a specific purpose. The author employs linguistic tools in the text based on assumptions of the knowledge of the audience. Operationally, Interaction is determined by the percentage of frequency of occurrence of five engagement markers: Personal pronouns, I, we, you; concessions; questions; commands; personal expressions of stance.

## Research Questions

The study attempted to find answers to the following questions:

What are the linguistic and interactional differences in argumentative EFL discourse amongst the three tasks: Academic essays, synchronous online forums and oral debates?

### Sub questions

1. What are the differences in the use of *complex syntax* (embedded clauses) across the three modalities under investigation?
2. What are the differences in *grammatical accuracy* across the three modalities under investigation?
3. What are the differences in the production of *engagement markers* (First and second personal pronouns; concessions; questions; commands; expressions of stance) across the three modalities under investigation?

## Methodology

### Participants

Undergraduate students enrolled in faculties in the third level of EAP in the British University in Egypt presented the subjects of the study. They studied in various faculties: Engineering, Business, Economics, and Pharmacy. Fifty-four students participated in the study, 33 females and 21 males, all placed in the module after passing the exams of a previous module that included a final 500-word opinion essay and two upper-intermediate academic reading passages in addition to an assimilation of the IELTS speaking and listening tests. Another criterion for the selection of the participants was passing Oxford Placement Test 2 (Allan, 2004) with an equivalent score of 5.5 on the IELTS test.

### Task designs

The students were required to write a final argumentative essay of 1000 words structured into five paragraphs, including paragraphs of counterarguments and refutations. The essay encompassed academic sources to support the student's position in the argument. A pre-task aimed at preparing students for the structure of the essay was assigned in the form of a 750-word argumentative essay that was submitted back to students with feedback on errors.

The second important task for this study is a synchronous online forum created in the form of a threaded discussion titled as 'single simple discussion' on the platform Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment 2 (Moodle2) (Büchner, 2011). The online forum was prepared as a collaborative task whereby students formed teams of 4 or 6 students of for and against mini-groups. The task was conducted synchronously in the computer lab during class sessions. The instructions determined 6 lines minimum for each post.

The oral debate required each group of students to be divided into two mini-groups of two or three members, with two opposing positions of an argument. Each mini-group was required to first present their position then make a rebuttal opposing the adverse group. The structure of the debate

flexibly allowed students to exchange turns of rebuttals and concessions. Like the academic essay, academic resources were required for argument support.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

Fifty-four individual essays and 137 posts of synchronous online forums were randomly selected from a corpus of 165 essays and 301 posts. All the data were then broken into T-units for analysis resulting in 2857 T-units for the academic essays and 691 T-units for the synchronous online forums. The data was then coded for the observed variables, 25 percent of which were reviewed by another coder, and full agreement was reached after discussions. Afterward, the coded transcripts were entered into the Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts (SALT; Miller & Chapman, 2003) software guide for counting codes. All codes were counted for frequency to be then calculated for percentages over a total number of utterances per text of each student. The percentages then were inserted into a spreadsheet in preparation for inferential statistics of repeated-measures analysis of variance – one-way ANOVA to find differences between the means of frequency for each indicator in the two examined tasks.

### **Results**

The present study has investigated the differences in argumentative discourse amongst synchronous online forums, academic essays and oral debates regarding three constructs: Syntactic complexity, grammatical accuracy, and Interaction. Each construct was observed through more specific measurable variables that were calculated for their percentage of frequency to a total number of utterances. Percentage scores were then analyzed via a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test for finding the differences amongst the three task groups followed by a more detailed analysis via the post hoc Tukey-Kramer test ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) for differences between pairs of tasks.



**Table 1.** Differences of percentage scores among tasks (*n= 54 per group*)

	Essay	Online Forum	Oral Debate
<b>Variable</b>			
Subordinate Clauses			
M	135.04	123.23	82.2
SD	37.94	59.05	28.77
Finite Sub Clause			
M	65.76	65.02	47.39
SD	25.1	35.03	20.95
Non-Finite Sub Clause			
M	69.27	58.21	34.82
SD	19.96	37.67	16.56
Error Free T.U.			
M	44.19	42.07	32.81
SD	21.84	20.82	14.12
Error Free T.U. with Complex Cl.			
M	26.7	23.76	10.09
SD	17.32	16.33	8.74
Error Free T.U. with a Simple Cl.			
M	17.52	18.37	22.78
SD	9.53	13.22	10.86
Personal Expression of Stance			
M	0.28	9.74	3.52
SD	0.94	10.14	5.36
Concessions			
M	1.01	4.04	3.19
SD	2.82	6.19	4.17
Commands			
M	5.26	6.85	4.15
SD	4.79	9.36	5.69
Questions			
M	1.69	2.46	4.09
SD	2.4	5.9	5.3
1st & 2nd Personal Pronouns			
M	5.98	24.28	40.78
SD	9.85	21.46	28.28
<i>Statistically significant variation among task groups</i>			

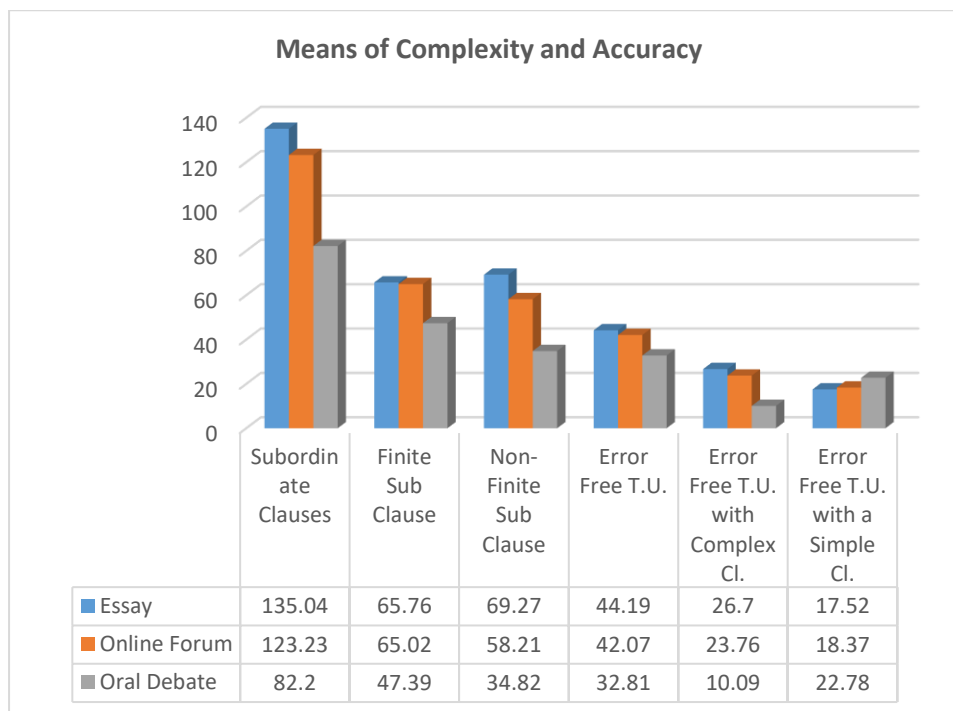
### *Syntactic complexity*

Three variables were calculated for the percentage of their frequency to the total number of utterances per text. Investigated total number of utterances was 2752 for the academic essays, 2225 for the oral debate, and 691 for the synchronous online fora. These three observed variables were subordinate clauses, finite subordinate clauses, non-finite subordinate clauses.

Analyzing differences via ANOVA, results recorded statistically significant variation amongst groups for all the three syntactic variables: Subordinate Clauses  $F(2, 159)= 21.66, P= 0.00$ ; Finite Subordinate Clauses (FSC),  $F(2, 159)= 7.64, P= 0.00$ ; Non-Finite Subordinate Clauses,  $F(2, 159)= 23.97, P = 0.00$ . The post hoc Tukey-Kramer test for differences between means with  $\alpha= 0.05$  showed that the differences for all the three variables lied between the essay and the debate, and the forum and the debate; while no statistically significant differences occurred between the essay and the forum showing closer percentages of frequency in students' performance and similar relationships with the third task, the oral debate which revealed the least frequencies for all syntactic variables (see table1). These results indicated a similarity between the effect of the online forum and the effect of the academic essay task on the intensive production of subordination by EFL students in contrast to the low effect of the oral debate (see figure1 for means).

### *Grammatical accuracy*

Grammatical accuracy was considered for the percentage of frequencies of three variables: Error Free Utterances; Error Free Utterances with Complex Sentences; Error Free Utterances with Simple Sentences. The higher the percentage and the mean of error-free utterances in the task, the more grammatically accurate the students' text is; consequently, the task can be categorized as academically influential.

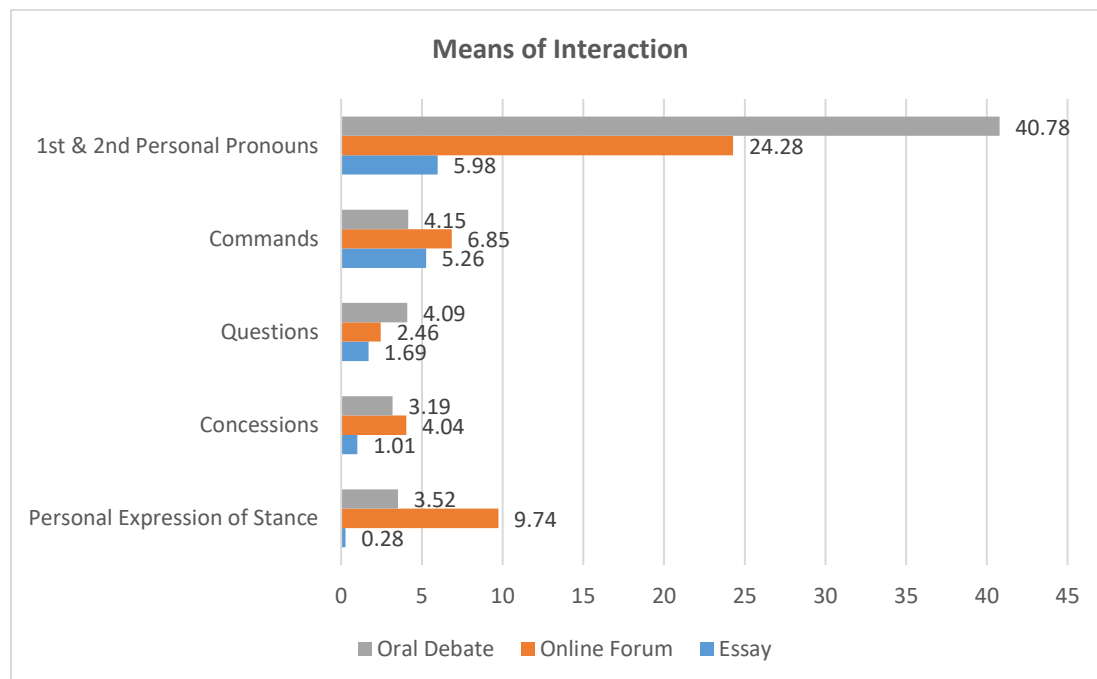


**Figure1.** Mean scores for syntactic complexity and grammatical accuracy

ANOVA analysis demonstrated statistically significant differences amongst the three task groups for the three variables of grammatical accuracy: Error Free Utterances,  $F(2, 159)= 5.34, p= 0.01$ ; Error Free Utterances with Complex Clauses,  $F(2, 159)= 19.79, P= 0.00$ ; Error-free utterance with a simple clause,  $F(2, 159)= 3.37, P= 0.04$ . A more detailed analysis into the differences between pairs of groups via the post hoc Tukey-Kramer test ( $\alpha= 0.05$ ) did not record any statistically significant difference between the academic essay and the online forum for all variables: error-free utterances ( $P= 0.83$ ); error-free utterances with complex clauses ( $P= 0.55$ ); error-free utterances with a simple clause ( $P= 0.91$ ). Similarly, they all revealed statistically significant results for the difference between the academic essay and the oral debate. AS of the variation between the online forum and the oral debate, both Error Free Utterances and Error Free Utterances with complex clauses were statistically significant, and Error Free Utterances with a simple clause were statistically insignificant ( $P= 0.11$ ). Means of frequency for Error Free Utterances and Error Free Utterances with complex clauses had the highest frequency in the academic essay followed by very close digits for the mean of the online forum and finally the lowest frequency for the oral debate (see Table1) (see Figure 1), while recording a different hierarchy for Error Free Utterances with a simple clause with the highest mean in the oral debate followed by the online forum and then the academic essay (See Table 1) (See Figure 1).

*Interaction*

Interaction between the writer/ speaker and the recipient, represented in the reader in the academic essay and the interlocutor in the oral debate and the online forum, was observed through variables that indicated the writer's or speaker's involvement and the extent of mitigation or directness of their expression of opinion in arguments. Therefore, Interaction was observed through the following five variables: Personal expressions of stance, concessions, commands, questions, first and second personal pronouns.



**Figure2.** Means of Interaction

Analyzing the differences across task groups, ANOVA showed statistically significant findings for Personal Expressions of Stance,  $F(2, 159)= 28.29, p=0.00$ ; concessions,  $F(2, 159)= 6.24, p= 0.00$ ; Questions,  $F(2, 159)= 3.56, p= 0.03$ ; First and Second Personal Pronouns,  $F(2, 159)= 36.16, p= 0.00$ ; whereas, non-statistically significant differences were recorded for Commands,  $F(2, 159)= 2.09, p= 0.13$ . For spotting the variation between pairs of tasks, The Tukey-Kramer test ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) highlighted statistically significant differences between all the three pairs of task groups for Personal Expression of Stance and First and Second Personal pronouns. Concessions had statistically significant results between pairs except for the online forum and oral debate due to their very close means of frequency (see Table 1). Questions, nonetheless, showed statistically significant results on the Tukey Kramer test ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) only between the academic essay and the oral debate, since non-statistically significant differences appeared between the academic essay and the online forum,  $p= 0.676$ , and between the online forum and the academic debate,  $p= 0.184$ . The order of means of frequency showed the highest scores for the oral debate followed by the online forum in the First and Second Personal Pronouns and in Questions; while the highest scores for the online forum appeared in Personal Expressions of Stance and Commands (See Table 1) (See Figure 2). The academic essay recorded the least means of frequency for three of the interactional variables, namely Personal Expressions of Stance, Questions, and First and Second Personal Pronouns.

## Discussion

The variant influence of task modality on students' discourse was clearly highlighted in the results of the investigated constructs in the present study. Results revealed significant effectiveness of synchronous online forums on syntactic complexity, grammatical accuracy, and Interaction and therefore highlighted the role these online forums can play compared to academic essays and oral debates in the academic EFL context. This discussion encompasses an interpretation of the quantitative results with a narrative analysis of students' transcripts.

### *Complexity and accuracy in written modalities*

Academic essays followed by online forums recorded the highest performance for all the syntactic complexity and grammatical accuracy variables except for one variable (Error Free Utterances with a simple clause), which revealed the highest occurrence in oral debates. Although the academic essay showed the highest means of frequency for all variables of syntactic complexity, differences with the synchronous online forum were not statistically significant since the means of frequency of all variables of syntactic complexity and grammatical accuracy (Error Free Utterances and Error Free Utterances with complex clause/s) were very close to the extent of reaching almost the same means of frequency for the production of finite subordinate clauses, the academic essay ( $M= 65.76, SD= 25.10$ ) and the online forum ( $M= 65.02, SD= 35.03$ ). The online forum had many features and procedures that were similar to the academic essay and hence similarly as effective in promoting the highest cognitively processed grammatical structure for EFL learners (Clahsen, 1984; Pienemann, 1998).

The students' tendency to use simple sentences in the oral debate and subordinate clauses [SC] in the online forum is clearly illustrated in the following samples from transcripts of the online forum and the oral debate of one of the students on the topic of legalization of selling organs. Whereas

the student produces two subordinate clauses [SC] in one online post, he produces two simple sentences [SS] in one turn in the oral debate.

Online forum post by Nour

*First of all, the checkups are never accurate, even if it is made by the top doctors around the globe or the world [SC]. For example, the hidden diseases inside the organs will not occur or show on the check-up unless it activates [sic] by the operation [SC].*

Oral debate, a turn by Nour

*First of all, one hundred percent is an overrated percentage [SS]. And you don't have a piece of evidence to prove your theory. It's just a theory [SS].*

Nippold et al. (2020) observed that a short argumentative writing task promoted complex syntactic structures even in the lower age levels of adolescents. Shakarami et al. (2016), similarly, found the same use of discourse markers in synchronous online forums and academic writing due to students' pass through the same stages of writing, pre-planning, writing, and revision, and their equal concern about coherence and cohesion in their online posts. In accordance, Jin et al. (2020) found that students focused on syntactic complexity and accuracy in argumentative essays more than oral discussions. And Tan & Dang (2022) found that essay writing on the IELTS Exam promoted the use of high percentages of subordinate clauses as essays with band scores below 6 comprised 56.2% and essays above band 6 even reached 74.2% of the total utterances. Observing finite and non-finite dependent clauses in conversation from the Longman Spoken and Written Corpus and academic research writing (the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Research Article Corpus), academic writing was dominated by non-finite dependent clauses while conversation recorded higher dependent clauses (Biber & Gray, 2016; Biber and Gray, 2010; Biber et al., 2011). The results of conversation are based on a corpus of native speakers, which is variant from the EFL learners in the current study who resorted to simple clauses more in their oral debates while using both finite dependent and non-finite subordinate clauses more in writing tasks. In the synchronous online forum, the student can read and reread the interlocutor's argument as well as review their own posts. The pace of typing, as well as the same since academic essays, are also typed, which is much slower than the pace of speaking in the oral debate. Consequently, EFL students had a longer time and better chance in the online forum, synchronous in mode, though, than oral debates to format more complex structures. In contrast to results of the present study regarding the difference in syntactic complexity between online and face to face discussions, Pyun (2003) found no statistically significant results in the complexity of T-units, and shorter length of T-units in online discussions, which was interpreted as a lower level of syntactic complexity. In summary, the formality of the synchronous online forum in the present study led to high production of syntactic complexity in students' online posts in a manner that resembled the academic essay, which is much higher than the oral debate.

### *Grammatical Accuracy*

The mean of frequency in the synchronous online forum ( $M= 23.76$ ,  $SD= 16.33$ ) was very close to the mean of frequency in the academic essay ( $M= 26.70$ ,  $SD=17.32$ ) for error-free utterances with complex clauses and for error-free utterances with a mean of  $M= 42.07$  ( $SD= 20.82$ ) for the online forum and a mean of  $M= 44.19$  ( $SD= 21.84$ ) for the academic essay. These findings contrasted those of Shakarami (2016), which revealed students' less concern with grammatical rules and punctuation in online discussions. However, online forums in the present study showed higher

grammatical accuracy than oral debate. A result also highlighted in Pyun (2003) comparing grammatical accuracy in face-to-face and online discussions where non-native speakers mentioned in interviews that they were keener to preserve accuracy in the writing mode of online discussions than in the oral mode of face-to-face discussions. Thus, online forums can be equally important to academic essays in the English academic classroom regarding the high stimulation of accurate complex syntactic structures in students' texts.

In contrast to all structural variables in the current study, Error Free Utterances with a simple clause was the only variable that recorded the highest frequency in the oral debate followed by online forums and the last occurrence in the academic essay due to students production of more simple clauses in oral debates as shown in the results of subordinate clauses.

Finally, the synchronous online forum was equally effective to the academic essay regarding the high production of grammatically accurate complex clauses and the oral debate for the high production of grammatically accurate simple clauses. Accordingly, synchronous online forums should be well employed in the academic classroom due to their high stimulation of grammatically accurate complex structures in students' texts.

### *Interaction in dialogic tasks*

Interaction in the three tasks under investigation showed the highest frequency in the two dialogic tasks, the synchronous online forum and the oral debate, rather than the academic essay. Five main variables were observed to measure the degree of the speaker's/ writer's involvement in arguments and explicitness of expressing stance. Such involvement and explicitness showed at its highest in the two tasks where the speaker in the debate and the writer in the online forum directly addressed the interlocutor, in contrast to the academic essay where the writer had to imagine and write a hypothetical opposing opinion to argue against. Hence, these findings suggest that synchronous communication shares common features of talk due to interactive exchange between interlocutors (Mick & Middlebrook, 2015). Personal expressions of stance (PES), Concessions, and Commands [COM] were two variables that recorded a peak in synchronous online forums, whereas Questions and First and Second Personal Pronouns were the other two interaction variables that reached the highest frequencies in the oral debate.

### *Synchronous online forums*

#### *Personal expression of stance (PES)*

Personal expression of stance in an argument dominated the synchronous online forum more than the oral debate and the academic essay with statistically significant differences. The academic essays infrequent to initiate an opinion with personal expressions of stance as students completely detached their voice from the argument. In the following two examples, the same student expressed the same opinion in an argument on feminism using the two different techniques in the online forum and the academic essay, respectively.

An online post by Maria

*[In my opinion][PES] [I don't believe][PES] that men should be tried as women because women have a high level of emotion.*

Academic essay by Maria

*But that doesn't deprive them of the fact that they are women and their nature is not like men. So there is no way they should be treated as men even if traditions and cultures are so free and open to this idea.*

Whilst in the online post, the student used two personal expressions of stance, in the academic essay, the student's opinion was directly expressed without any introductory clauses. In the online posts, students generally started with expressions of stance as an initiation to their post or to begin a disagreement. They used the following expressions "I agree with", "I agree that", "I think", "In my opinion", "I see that", "my position is", "my point of view", "I believe", "I disagree with", "I am extremely against this point", "I don't believe", "I have a different opinion", "I will argue". Nippold et al. (2020) found that critical thinking tasks instigated the use of metacognitive verbs in adolescents. Similar to the present findings, in a comparison of dialogic and monologic academic tasks (Kashiha, 2021), the debate as the representative of the dialogic task exceeded seminars, a monologic task, in the frequency of expressions of stance as speakers needed to justify their claims and rebuttals before the interlocutor, one frequent example in the debates was 'I agree'. However, 'I think' was used for hedging before introducing information more frequently in seminars than debates so that they are not considered academic facts. Myers (2010), likewise, highlighted the fact that bloggers used introductory clauses such as "I think, I truly believe" (p. 102) to introduce their opinion in online blogs in order to save face and for mitigation against counterarguments. In addition, the fact that online forums in the present study recorded a higher frequency of personal expressions of stance (PES) not only than academic essays but also than oral debates due to students' concern with mitigating their stance in the arguments went in congruence with Wang & Woo's (2007) findings where online discussions included less aggressive arguments than face to face discussions in class. The context of online forums in the present study allowed students to directly communicate with their interlocutors lacking, nevertheless, the influence of tone, body language, and facial expressions available in the oral face to face debates, a matter which urged students to use more introductory clauses to initiate stance in the arguments and to express their opinion for mitigation indirectly.

### *Concessions*

A concession is a statement of agreement or submission to the opposing claim in an argument. No other task could win over the synchronous online task in the frequency of concessions which mostly functioned as an initiation for the following rebuttal. This is illustrated in the following example from the online forum on child labor.

An online post by Mirna

*Yes, they should be out playing and enjoying their life [CON]. However, we do not live in a perfect world [RB].*

In this study, students used an expression of agreement before a rebuttal to save face in a post of rebuttal or refutation, a mitigation strategy that is also used by students in online forums in a translation classroom in Fernandez-Polo & Cal-Varela (2018), where they started their posts by praising the points they agree with before they start their criticism on a piece of work. Duvall et al. (2020) argued that online forums of high knowledge construction design should include forms of negotiation. In Myers (2010) and Potter (2008), participants also used concessions before

adversative conjunctions like 'but'. Likewise, Costley & Lange (2016) investigated the highest factors representing social presence in online forums found agreement in 42% of students' posts to become the highest percentage compared to affective and cohesive indicators. And Fu et al. (2016) recorded a relatively high occurrence of agreement in the online discussions for grade 10 students.

The second most frequent task was the face-to-face oral debate, which also included some concessions, sometimes having the same function as the online forum and sometimes displaying the function of a short answer to a challenging question raised by the opposing participant. Nevertheless, the academic essay rarely encompassed concessions due to the absence of the dialogic style. Similarly, Jin et al. (2020) observed negotiation strategies by students in dialogic oral discussions rather than monologic essays. The writer in the academic essay did not have the same need to use face-saving strategies with the absence of the opponent in the argument.

### *Commands*

Commands were clear in statements of obligation using 'must' or necessity using 'should'. They were used mainly for suggesting a solution for the argument, similarly employed in all three tasks as the following example is from the argument on the validity of the death penalty.

Online forum sample

*"If a society has high interests to prevent murdering, it should use [COM] the most painful punishment that exists".*

The use of commands in general rarely occurred in all three tasks. Such rare occurrence of commands also showed in Kuteeva (2011) in collaborative and individual argumentative essays. Nevertheless, the highest mean of frequency showed in the synchronous online forum followed by the oral debate in spite of the fact that the differences were statistically not significant.

### *Oral debate*

#### *Questions*

The highest mean of frequency for questions appeared in the oral debate to be followed by the synchronous online forum, and the least occurrence showed in the academic essay. The difference between the oral debate and the online forum was statistically non-significant, making it as effective as the oral debate in stimulating the production of questions in EFL students in the academic context. The absence of statistically significant difference was also found by Wang & Woo (2007) and Pyun (2003) between the frequency of questions in face-to-face and online discussions of students and non-native speakers of English, respectively. Online discussions of argumentative discourse showed a high frequency of questions as well in Fu et al. (2016). This is due to the use of questions more frequently in dialogic arguments, not for the purpose of requesting but rather to challenge the interlocutor and hence function as a rebuttal most of the time. This purpose is clearly shown in the following example.

Online forum post by Radwa:

*Why does she carry a baby without her disagreement [Question]? This is so obvious that abortion can change one's life.*

The student did not wait for an answer; however, the question was used for a rebuttal performing the same function of questions in the oral debate. The same function of questions was also revealed



in Shukor et al. (2014) in an investigation of levels of knowledge construction in online discussions formed by undergraduate students. Findings showed that groups with a high level of knowledge construction used questions asking the opponent for elaboration as a strategy of rebuttal in order to show their disagreement. Myers (2010), analyzing online blogs, highlighted the same strategy of using rhetorical questions to express their position.

Regarding academic essays, questions were rarely used, with only a mean frequency of 1.69. The lack of direct Interaction with the recipient did not urge students to use questions, even if as a form of hypothetical challenge or a strategy of rebuttal for the reader.

### *First and second personal pronouns*

Personal pronouns in this study referred to self-mention via the use of first personal pronouns 'I' and 'we', and addressing the recipient via the second personal pronoun 'you'. Results revealed a high mean of frequency ( $M=40.78$ ) in the oral debate that was followed by the synchronous online forum ( $M=24.28$ ). These results were due to the fact that students needed personal pronouns indirectly expressing their positions in arguments as in "I think", "I believe" in the online forum, and the second personal pronoun 'you' for directly addressing the interlocutor. Moreover, conversations aiming at the implied meaning and shared contexts between interlocutors are usually more dominated by pronouns than academic writing, which requires meaning to be more explicitly written to the reader, leading to more dependent clauses for elaboration (Biber & Gray, 2016). Likewise, comparing debates (dialogic) to seminars (monologic), Kashiha (2021) found that self-mention through the use of 'I' and 'we' recorded the higher frequency in debates by native speakers of English as the speaker used 'I' to confirm their voice and identity in the argument. In O'halloran (2011), oral debates of book discussions (O'halloran, 2011) were dominated by the use of the personal pronoun 'I' and direct expressions of personal opinion as 'I thought'. The academic essay, nonetheless, showed a very low frequency of self-mention and addressing the reader pronouns ( $M=5.98$ ), representing, therefore, the least effective task in the stimulation of Interaction between the writer and the recipient and leading the online forum to have a higher influence on Interaction between the writer and the recipient due to its dialogic nature. In consistence with these findings, Hewing and Coffin (2007) found a higher frequency of the personal pronoun 'I' in online discussions than in academic essays for being less face-threatening since the personal pronoun 'I' was used to express feelings and thought as an introductory phrase before an opinion such as in 'I feel'.

In conclusion, Interaction is better enhanced in dialogic argumentation synchronous online forums and oral debates. Synchronous online forums further stimulate some interactional features due to the need for mitigation, initiation of argumentation, and self-mention in the online context.

### *Pedagogical implications*

The results of this study have clearly illustrated the value of synchronous online forums in the English academic classroom regarding the stimulation of complex and grammatical accurate sentence structures assimilating the impact of the academic essay. Simultaneously, they enhance the employment of interactional discourse due to their dialogic structure exactly like the oral debates and due to students' preference of many of the task features such as enhancing knowledge construction, the community of practice, and consumption of the online system (Tran et al., 2022). Online forums can hence be well employed if the teacher's instructions should be formal regarding the number of words and posts required in the discussion. And students should be required to read

on the discussed topics. Rubrics should be designed to evaluate the online posts, their arguments, use of evidence and shared with the students. Online forums can be a regular weekly or biweekly task that demands effort. Regarding the design of academic writing tasks such as the argumentative essay, teachers should allow voice through the use of first personal pronouns for the writer to directly express their stance to assemble some of the influential features of dialogic argumentative tasks. The current results illustrate the high impact short online production can have on students' discourse and Interaction since they allow more mitigation strategies than oral debates.

### *Limitations*

This study focused on the difference between online forums, academic essays, and oral debates through argumentative discourse and did not widen the scope to other discourse genres. In addition, the study is limited to the results of students in the EFL context of Arabic as their L1. The results are also limited to threaded discussions. Therefore, other platforms with different designs of discussions, such as mind mapping, need to be examined for their influence on students' academic discussions and argumentative discourse.

### *Recommendations for further research*

The positive influence of synchronous online forums on students' formal writing and Interaction urges the need for further investigation of the different strategies of using collaborative online forms of discussions in the academic context. Other forms of online collaborative discussions of argumentation are labeled mind maps which have a different structure than the threaded forms of discussions. Further research is required regarding the influence of these platforms on critical thinking, knowledge construction, and undergraduate students' discourse. The variables in the current studies could also contribute to further computational studies of argumentation mining for testing the reliability of computational feedback on Interaction and knowledge construction in students' writing tasks.

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## Biodata

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## Non-English-major students' Attitudes toward English Learning and Teaching via Video Conferencing

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** video conferencing, attitude, gender, students, ULSA2

Because of the spread and outbreak of COVID-19, learning and teaching forms have significantly altered at all levels, from high school to higher education. Most educational institutions have applied video conferencing in learning and teaching to maintain learning and teaching activities. Video conferencing is used to facilitate the learning and teaching process between instructors and learners during an epidemic. The study involved 203 students from six majors, including Human Resources Management (HR), Accounting, Insurance, Business Administration (BA), Social Works, and Labor Economics (LE), to explore students' views on English learning and teaching via video conferencing at the University of Labor and Social Affairs (Campus 2) (ULSA2). A well-structured questionnaire was used to gather data from respondents. The data revealed that ULSA2 students have a positive attitude toward video conferencing learning, with significant differences in attitude across gender, technical proficiency, and competencies.

### Introduction

The fast increase and usage of virtual communities, online interactive apps, online conferences, and web-based technologies, according to Yapici and Akbayin (2012), has resulted in the Internet being successfully used in a wide range of disciplines, including educational systems. According to Hazendar (2012), creating a modern learning and teaching environment includes a variety of techniques and employments such as computer-based learning and Internet-based learning, digital cooperation, and practical courses. As a result, video conferencing for learning and teaching has recently been regarded as a viable and temporary solution to maintaining learning and teaching activities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected almost every activity in our lives. The government has been facing between closing schools (to reduce contact and survive) and keeping them open (to maintain daily lives). Schools and educational institutions must change their forms of learning

and teaching from on-based into online via video conferencing. Student assessments are also done online, with a lot of trial, error, and uncertainty for both instructors and students.

To ensure knowledge for students during the break time due to epidemics, video conferencing in learning and teaching activities has been boldly applied at the University of Labor and Social Affairs- Campus II (ULSA2) since March 2020. However, the key concern is whether USLA2 students would be willing to use e-learning capabilities as they progress. To get an answer to this topic, the author used video conferencing to confirm students' opinions toward English learning and teaching.

The aims of this study are to:

- Investigate non-English major students' perceptions and attitudes at ULSA2 toward technological application in English learning.
- Investigate non-English major students' attitude at ULSA2 towards English learning and teaching via video conferencing.

## Literature Review

### *E-learning*

The growth of science and technology has an impact on both science and technology in general and education in particular. The development of technology infrastructure for educational institutions is becoming increasingly crucial, especially since educational techniques and technologies advance at a rapid pace.

The proliferation of e-learning settings is another key contribution of current technical breakthroughs to education. The learning environment has considerably changed due to advances in technology and communications, especially current audiovisual gadgets and online learning environments that provide lifetime learning opportunities by bridging socioeconomic divides (Duran et al., 2006).

According to Bhubaneswari & Padmanaban (2012), e-learning provides learners with the convenience of choosing their own learning time, learning resources, and learning location (anywhere with Internet connectivity). Also, e-learners can pick their own learning pace, length, and the number of courses; resources and information can already be collected and regenerated; the effectiveness of education can be checked quickly, and course criteria can be gained dependently by e-learners. Many learners and trainers may lack the abilities and experience required to effectively use web-based learning platforms in learning and teaching activities.

According to recent studies on gender disparities in computer use, female students are at a disadvantage because of different computer usage patterns (Richter, Naumann, & Horz, 2001). According to the online Oxford Dictionary, video conferences are defined as "meetings in which persons from diverse locations communicate via voice and video. Available tools for learning via video conferencing, including Google Meet, Zoom, Class-in, and Microsoft Teams, were typically used during the COVID-19. Fatani (2020) indicated that video conferencing enabled



educational organizations and schools to maintain their operations throughout the COVID-19 cycle and set up the groundwork for the creation of online teaching activities in remote training. Adewole-Odeshi et al (2014) stated that video conferencing can improve education by creating an environment where students and teachers can exchange their knowledge and experiences.

### *Gender*

According to Liaw & Huang (2011), many studies have attempted to determine how factors such as gender, year of study, and student perceptions of e-learning influence student attitudes toward e-learning. According to various studies, male students have more positive attitudes toward e-learning than female students. According to their findings, male learners had a more positive attitude toward e-learning than female learners. They also argued that their computer experiences and abilities influence learners' motivation for e-learning.

Rhema, & Miliszewska (2014) provided a contrary viewpoint, claiming that there is no significant difference in male and female attitudes regarding e-learning.

Gender plays a substantial impact in deciding the intention to accept new technology in only a few settings, according to Suri and Sharma (2013), and there are cases when gender differences are impossible to determine.

When analyzing students' attitude towards e-learning Hussain et al. (2010) exposed that male students showed more positive attitude towards e-learning in Pakistan in comparison with female students.

### *Attitudes*

Students' attitudes about e-learning may be viewed as a ceiling for ICT-supported instructional practices (Internet and communication technologies). It is influenced by their agreement or dissatisfaction with technology's usefulness and individual abilities. Furthermore, learners' attitudes about e-learning are impacted by their knowledge of the benefits and downsides of this type of education (Rafi et al. 2006)

According to Bhatia (2011), variables such as patience, self-discipline, simplicity of use of software, high technical skills, and time management abilities impact students' attitudes toward e-learning. As a result, students' attitudes might be positive (if the new type of education fits their needs and attributes) or negative (if the learners cannot adapt to the new system because of their limitations).

### *Technology Usage and Skills*

According to Hussain et al. (2010), computer-based learning has grown significantly in underdeveloped nations. The utilization of internet networks, laptops, and cellphones stimulated learners' curiosity. An increasing number of learners is using these technologies throughout the world for instructional purposes. This demonstrates that students have advanced computer abilities and use them to their advantage in a variety of applications. Students' capacity to utilize the Internet and communication technologies was severely limited due to a

lack of technological access to Internet and communication technologies (ICTs).

Bhuasiri et al. (2012) agreed that increasing technology knowledge and improving e-learning behavior involves promoting primary technology knowledge and expertise, improving study content, requiring computer training, motivating users to use e-learning systems, and requiring a high level of institutional support.

Nguyen, T. K., & Nguyen, T. H. T. (2021) discovered that teachers would be able to continue continuous education during the COVID-19 outbreak by leveraging video conferencing technology. One of the main reasons for using video conferencing for teaching is to gain support from communities and professionals in the same sector, resulting in the creation of numerous valuable values for teachers. Instructors were able to create positive behaviors that enabled them to use information technology to enhance education by using video conferencing to educate during the COVID-19 outbreak. Habitual characteristics have the greatest influence on the intention to use conference sessions. When embracing remote learning, teachers should use video conferencing regularly and consistently to create habits.

In a research on Effects of Using Computer-Based Activities in Teaching English Speaking at a High School in Ho Chi Minh City, Nguyen, T. M. N. (2022) indicated that most of students expected the classroom environment with the use of CBA because they have more interaction and more practice than in the traditional classroom one.

Pham, N. K. T. (2021) claimed that Online Micro-Teaching (OMT) might teach participants teaching and digital skills in six different methods. They also had to deal with three major challenges: (1) monitoring students' learning progress/attention/concentration, (2) encouraging students' participation, engagement, and collaboration, and (3) utilizing technology (Internet connection and teaching equipment). Participants, on the other hand, offered five major suggestions for improving future OMT sessions: (1) backup plans, (2) preparation, (3) training and rehearsal with tools and OMT, (4) engagement strategies, and (5) classroom management and professionalism. They also suggested some online OMT tools.

Regarding the importance of using the Internet in learning, Ngo, D. H. (2021) argued that 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.

### *Research question*

This study seeks to address three following questions in order to determine whether the e-learning technique is appropriate for ULSA2 based on the literature review, past studies, and research problems:

1. What are the students' attitudes toward technological application in English learning at ULSA2?
2. What are non-English major students' attitudes toward English learning and teaching via video conferencing at ULSA2?

3. Are there significant differences in attitudes towards technological application in general as well as e-learning approach according to gender and majors?

## Methodology

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

A questionnaire was used to evaluate students' views on English learning and teaching via video conferencing. The target population consisted of 203 ULSA2 students majoring in HR, Accounting, Insurance, BA, SW and LE

### *Design of the Study*

The current study, which is based on a descriptive case study, offers a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of a specific phenomenon. Descriptive case studies describe real-life phenomena and the context in which they occur. This research strategy was chosen because it explains and focuses on the students' attitudes toward studying English via video conferencing. The descriptive theory was employed to determine the depth of the case in this instance. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire is divided into three parts. The demographic profile of the respondents is shown in the first section, which includes gender, age, and majors. Part 2 has seven items that cover computer skills and abilities related to e-learning tools and activities, while Part 3 contains ten items that cover overall attitudes about English learning and teaching via video conferencing.

### *Data collection & analysis*

A Vietnamese version of the questionnaire was created on Google Forms and given to the students by colleagues. Participants were requested to complete the questionnaire. From June through July of 2021, data was collected and analyzed.

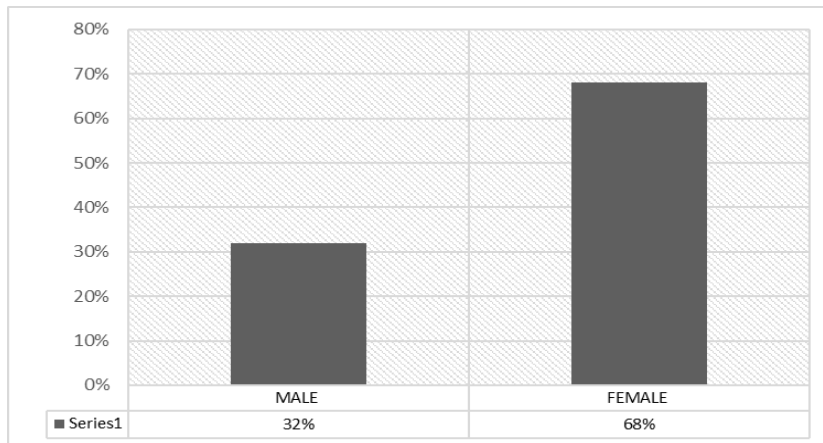
The statistical Package for Social Science 20 (SPSS 20) was used to collect data and display descriptive statistics.

The reliability coefficient test was used to investigate item dependability. Cronbach Alpha was found to be satisfactory at 0.794, indicating acceptable dependability consistency.

## Findings and Discussions

### *Participant demographic*

The participants' demographic features are discussed in this section (gender, major, technological ability, and e-learning experience).



**Figure 1.** Respondents' distribution according to gender

As can be seen in Figure 1, female students account for 68% of the population, while male students account for 32%. The number in the figure above indicates that the number of female students in this study is more than the number of male students.

**Table 1.** Respondents' distribution according to majors

Majors	Frequency	Percent
Accounting	18	8.9 %
Insurance	20	9.9 %
Labor Economics	55	27.1 %
Social Works	11	5.4 %
Business Administration	45	22.1 %
Human Resource Management	54	26.6 %
Total	203	100 %

Table 1 reveals that of 203 students of ULSA2 responded to the questionnaires. According to the results of the distribution of students, the majority of the participants are from 3 majors: 27.1% of respondents are from Labor Economics, 26.6% from Human Resources Management, 22.2% from Business Administration. The others come from departments including Insurance (9.9%), Accounting (8.9%), and Social Work (5.4%).

*Technology usage and skills***Table 2.** Technology usage and skills

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Technology Usage	203	1.83	5.00	3.954	.631
Valid N (listwise)	203				

As displayed in Table 2, the technology usage and skills by ULSA2 students are rated to be quite high ( $M=3.95$ ). It indicates that ULSA2 students often use technology in learning activities.

**Table 3.** Technology usage and skills

Content	Mean	SD
I do not feel scared when using technology in studying English	3.28	1.217
I am interested in studying English via video conference.	3.75	.974
Technology facilitates the English learning process	3.98	.887
I often download English materials from the Internet	4.20	.862
I don't have any trouble in using technology in learning English	4.22	.772
I often use social networks such as Facebook, Zalo, Twitter... to exchange learning materials with teachers and classmates	4.31	.865

The survey results of 203 ULSA2 students in Table 3 above reveal that most participants believe that they frequently utilize social networks for learning activities ( $M=4.31$ ) and have no difficulty utilizing technology to study English ( $M=4.22$ ). In addition, they are interested in studying English via video conference ( $M=3.75$ ), and technology facilitates the English learning process ( $M=3.98$ ), and they often download English materials from the Internet ( $M=4.20$ ). This proves that students are familiar with the use of technology in learning in general and learning English in particular.

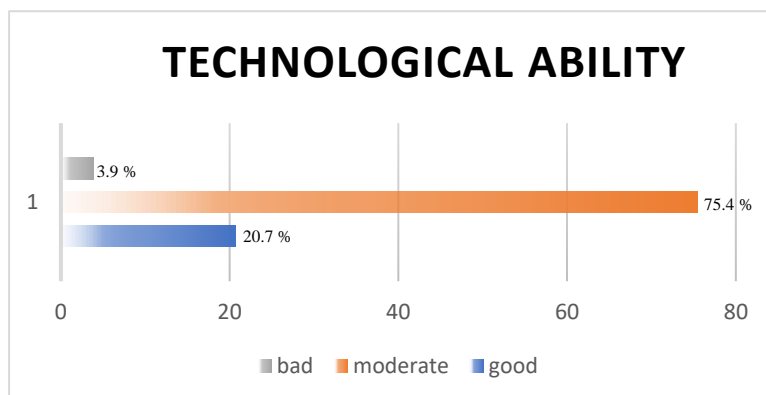
**Figure 2.** Respondents' distribution according to ability in using the technology

Figure 2 gives information about students' ability to use the technology in learning activities at the University of Labor and Social Affairs.

Overall, students have a moderate capacity to utilize computers and technology in general (75.4 %), whereas only 20.7% of participants have a good technological ability. However, 3.9 % of them admit that their computer network technology's application in education is still limited. This circumstance necessitates that universities enhance awareness of the value of technology in general and in learning in particular, as well as strengthen their technological abilities.

#### *Differences in attitudes towards using technology according to gender*

As can be seen from Table 4, the p-value is 0.371 ( $P > 0.05$ ), which indicates that the difference in technology use between males and females is not statistically significant at the 5% level of significance. The difference is predicted to be 0.9% (SE = 0.1 %). However, inadequate evidence ( $p = 0.371$ ) demonstrates that gender influences technological attitudes.

**Table 4.** Differences in attitudes towards using technology according to gender

Independent Samples Test									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						
	f	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.620	<b>.432</b>	-.896	201	<b>.371</b>	-.092	.103	-.297	.111
Equal variances not assumed			-.823	71.291	.413	-.092	.112	-.318	.132

There is no significant difference in the scores for male ( $M=3.88$ ,  $SD=0.71$ ) and female ( $M=3.97$ ,  $SD=0.60$ ) conditions;  $t(201) = 0.89$ ,  $p = 0.371$ . There is an estimated change of 0.9 % (SE = 0.1%). However, there is inadequate evidence ( $p = 0.371$ ) to demonstrate that gender influences technological attitudes.

#### *Differences in attitudes towards using technology according to majors*

**Table 5.** Differences in attitudes towards using technology according to majors

ANOVA					
Using Technology In General					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.388	6	.278	.690	<b>.631</b>
Within Groups	79.226	197	.402		
Total	80.614	203			

The result from Table 5 reveals that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean rating by students of majors who use technology. The significance value is 0.631 ( $p = .631$ ), which is higher than 0.05. The majors' means are roughly equal.

**Table 6.** Attitudes towards using technology according to majors

TECHNOLOGY USE IN GENERAL								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min	Max
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Human Resource Management	30	3.988	.60795	.11100	3.7619	4.2159	2.50	5.00
Accounting	52	4.041	.581	.080	3.879	4.203	2.50	5.00
Labor Economics	57	3.850	.602	.079	3.691	4.010	1.83	5.00
Business Administration	24	4.034	.723	.147	3.729	4.340	1.83	5.00
Insurance	27	3.956	.760	.146	3.656	4.257	2.50	5.00
Social Work	13	3.833	.565	.156	3.491	4.174	3.17	4.67
<b>Total</b>	203	3.954	.631	.044	3.867	4.042	1.83	5.00

As displayed in Table 6 above, students of all majors use technology in their learning in remarkably similar ways. Specifically, the mean scores of the majors are rated from high to low by students are: (1) Accounting (M=4.04), BA (M=4.03), HR (M=3.98), Insurance (M=3.95), LE (M=3.85), SW (M=3.89) and SW (M=3.83).

#### Students' attitudes toward English learning via video conferencing

**Table 7.** Students' attitudes toward English learning via video conference

Overall Attitude	Mean	SD
My English grades have improved while using video conferencing	2.97	.777
Learning via video conferencing improves my interaction in English class.	2.94	1.159
Learning via video conferencing enhances my motivation and interest to learn English	3.02	1.160
Learning via video conferencing has improved my communication competence in English	2.90	1.119
I can understand the subjects of the courses better	3.33	.976
I have begun saving time.	4.14	.796
I take the initiative in studying while learning via video conference	3.71	.958
Learning via video conferencing is more comfortable and enjoyable to me.	3.67	.842
I intend to take part in learning other courses via video conferencing in the future, if available	3.46	.991
Learning via video conferencing is an efficient learning method in the future	3.46	.897

As can be seen from Table 7, learning via video conferencing helps students save time with a mean score of 4.14. This indicates that online learning allows students to save time and become

more engaged in their learning activities. The contents are rated at a fairly high level when learning via video conferencing are Students to take the initiative in their studies ( $M=3.71$ ); Most of the students feel comfortable and enjoyable towards learning via video conferencing ( $M=3.67$ ); They intend to enroll in an online course in the future ( $M=3.46$ ), and they agree that Learning via video conferencing is an efficient learning method in the future ( $M=3.46$ ). This indicates that students have a positive attitude towards learning via video conferencing. However, their English grades, communication competence, and interaction are not improved via video conferencing class with the scores is  $M=2.97$ ,  $M=2.90$ , and  $M=2.94$ , respectively. This shows that students are excited about using video conferencing to learn. On the other hand, learning results have remained unchanged. In this situation, universities must figure out how to assist their students in improving their learning outcomes.

#### *Attitudes toward learning via video conferencing according to gender*

**Table 8.** Attitudes toward learning via video conference

Descriptive Statistics					
Attitudes toward English learning and teaching via video conferencing	N	Min	Max	M	SD
	203	1.14	5.00	3.61	.954
Valid N (listwise)	203				

The survey result of 203 ULSA2 students in Table 8 about their attitudes toward video conferencing learning is pretty impressive ( $M=3.61$ ,  $S.D=0.95$ ). It indicates that ULSA2 students have a positive attitude regarding learning via video conferencing. This conclusion is similar to (Hoang, T. T. D., & Tran, Q. H., 2021), who found that students had more positive attitudes about studying through online education. In view of the escalating covid-19 epidemic, educators' suggestions were offered to enhance the efficacy of online instruction.

**Table 9.** Attitude towards learning via video conferencing according to gender

Group Statistics					
Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Attitudes	M	53	<b>3.56</b>	.717	.098
	F	150	<b>3.28</b>	.640	.052

As displayed in Table 9, the mean of attitude scores for male and female university students is found to be ( $M=3.56$ ) and ( $M=3.28$ ), respectively. It indicates that both male and female ULSA2 students are enthusiastic about studying via video conferencing; however, male students are more enthusiastic about e-learning than their female counterparts.



**Table 10.** The difference in attitudes toward learning via video conferencing between male and female

Independent Samples Test									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.294	<b>.257</b>	2.572	201	<b>.011</b>	.271	.105	.063	.480
Equal variances not assumed			2.436	83.091	.017	.271	.111	.049	.493

As shown in Table 10, the survey result about the difference in attitudes toward learning via video conferencing between males and females is 0.257, which is statistically significant at a significance level of (0.011). As a result, there is a substantial difference in mindset between male and female students when it comes to studying via video conferencing. Given the foregoing, the null hypothesis is ruled out. As a result, when ULSA2 male and female students are compared, there is a significant difference in attitudes toward learning via video conferencing. This conclusion is similar to Bhuasiri et al. (2012), who found that male and female university students have different views about video conferencing learning.

#### *Attitude towards learning via video conferencing according to majors*

**Table 11.** Attitude towards learning via video conferencing according to majors

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.527	<b>6</b>	<b>.505</b>	1.128	<b>.347</b>
Within Groups	88.22	<b>197</b>	.448		
Total	90.75	203			

A one-way ANOVA analysis was conducted to compare the effect of majors on attitude towards learning via video conferencing. Table 11 reveals that majors had no significant impact on attitudes about video conferencing learning at the  $p > .05$  level [ $F(5, 197) = 0.505, p = 0.347$ ].

**Table 12.** Attitude towards learning via video conferencing according to majors

Descriptive								
	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min	Max
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Human Resource Management	30	3.546	.61685	.1126	3.3163	3.7770	2.20	4.60
Accounting	52	3.44	.731	.101	3.236	3.644	2.20	5.00
Labor Economics	57	3.25	.691	.091	3.071	3.437	1.90	4.50
Business Administration	24	3.22	.665	.135	2.939	3.502	2.20	4.50
Insurance	27	3.32	.629	.121	3.077	3.574	2.10	4.60
Social Work	13	3.39	.466	.129	3.110	3.674	2.50	4.10
Total	203	3.35	.670	.047	3.266	3.452	1.90	5.00

As shown in Table 12, the attitudes towards learning via video conferencing according to majors are rated from high to low by ULSA2 students are: Human Resources Management and Accounting must be high in order to see an effect on attitude with the scores  $M=3.57$  and  $M=3.45$  respectively and Labor Economics and Business Administration just get the low scores ( $M=3.50$  and  $3.22$  respectively).

### *Limitations and Recommendations*

Based on their findings, the researchers have made the following recommendations. First, the study's sample size is tiny (203 participants). If more population is included in the study, it will be more trustworthy. Second, this study only found out the learners' perceptions of video conferencing. The findings of this study will be more persuasive and objective if there are ULSA2 teachers' thoughts on their students' learning activities via video conferencing. Therefore, similar studies should be conducted to investigate instructors' perceptions of video conferencing further. Because there is a limitation of student-instructor engagement via video conferencing, instructors must employ a comprehensive and appropriate solution to remedy this. Finally, this study only looked at how students' perceptions regarding video conferencing are influenced by their gender and major. Additional research is needed to look at factors such as class level, learning style, and motivation type that may impact students' attitudes toward video conferencing learning.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this research is to find out how ULSA2 students feel about utilizing video conferencing for learning purposes. The study looked at how gender and majors affected students' technology usage and talents, as well as their views about video conferencing learning. This study discovered that gender has a statistically significant impact on attitudes toward video conferencing learning. The researchers may infer with high confidence that undergraduate

students are keen to study a range of courses online since ULSA2 students have a generally good attitude about learning through video conferencing. According to the findings, video conferencing provides tremendous prospects for higher education and institutions to reach a large number of students desiring to continue their education. Professors must find strategies to change students' negative views toward online learning by increasing the number of e-learning courses available and encouraging students to use the Internet for their education and communication with their lecturers and peers.

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## Biodata

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## Online Teaching Satisfaction amid the Covid-19 Pandemic: Evidence from a Vietnamese Higher Education Context


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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** COVID-19, teacher satisfaction, higher education, Vietnam.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced most higher education institutions around the globe to move their teaching and learning to online modes. This has had enormous impacts on teachers, especially those with limited experience in online teaching. This study was conducted to identify significant predictors of teacher satisfaction and their live online teaching experience during the coronavirus pandemic in Vietnam. The study used a mixed-methods approach with exploratory factor analysis, multiple regression techniques, and thematic analytical strategies to analyze survey data from 206 Vietnamese university lecturers. The study results indicated that online interaction, support from the institution, technology-related issues, and students' online efficacy were the key factors affecting lecturer satisfaction. In addition, the study results offer practical implications for educational managers in their long-term investment in online education in a developing country context.

## 1. Introduction

The coronavirus that emerged at the end of December 2019 caused an unprecedented phenomenon when students of all levels were forced to study online due to the suspension of in-person classes. While educational institutions in the developed regions might be better prepared for online teaching and learning, schools and universities in the developing world had to rely on free applications like Zoom and Google Workspace (formerly G Suite) to host online classes (Aguilera-Hermida et al., 2021). These make-shift digital lessons barely satisfied the needs of students and teachers because many had neither online learning nor online teaching experience.

Vietnam successfully implemented pandemic control through a zero-Covid policy at the beginning of the outbreaks. Nevertheless, like most countries, the country's robust measures affected people of all walks of life, especially teachers and students. In fact, the continuous waves of the coronavirus suspended the most important student examinations - the high school completion and university entrance exams. They also had the most extended lunar new year (called Tet) in its modern history. Most Vietnamese higher education institutions switched to online teaching and learning in confronting the pandemic. While a few universities were familiar with and prepared for this mode of lesson delivery, many had to hurriedly train their

teachers and students in pedagogical and technical skills in order to sustain education (Pham & Ho, 2020).

Prior to the pandemic, the country's Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) had issued policies and directions to encourage educational institutions to deliver online courses and services to their students and the public. The country's national television channel broadcasts distance courses in languages, general knowledge, life skills, and school subjects like mathematics, physics, and chemistry (MOETa, 2020). This television source was primarily used before July's entrance examination to universities in Vietnam. MOET also provided guidance on quality assurance of online learning, especially the official guidelines on quality assurance of online distance teaching (MOETb, 2020).

Nevertheless, due to the compulsory migration to online teaching and learning, many issues needed further investigation, including teacher satisfaction. This study was an attempt to explore the factors that influence Vietnamese lecturer satisfaction with live online teaching in a higher education context. It combined analyses of quantitative data (through an online survey) and qualitative data (through semi-structured interviews) to obtain a picture of the teachers' experiences and perceived satisfaction in performing the unprecedented mode of lesson delivery.

## 2. Literature Review

Teacher satisfaction is a complex issue, and components of teacher satisfaction need to be investigated as they play an essential role in promoting online interaction through scaffolding strategies and, most importantly, ensuring the quality of online education (Cho & Cho, 2016). Teachers are more satisfied when they believe that students can achieve better learning outcomes, the foundation of online learning satisfaction (Allen & Seaman, 2015). Teacher satisfaction in online learning is dependent on several factors, including their perceptions about the effectiveness of online teaching, support from institutions, online interaction, and many other academic and non-academic issues (Daniel, 2020; Kuo et al., 2014; Pakkad, 2021; Sobaih, 2021). During the pandemic, teachers played a key role in innovating and designing flexible programs to suit live online teaching and learning (Dhawan, 2020; Teng & Wu, 2021).

Research on teacher experience in online teaching is often based on the technology acceptance model (TAM) created by Davis (1989). This model predicts users', including teachers' perceptions and willingness to adopt online teaching. However, due to the coronavirus, most teachers had to use available applications for their online work and changed their mindset for the betterment of their students (Shenoy et al., 2020). As a result, these teachers had fewer options as they were forced to adapt to the "new normal" of education (Moralista & Oducado, 2020). Therefore, institutions had to invest in teacher training and technical support of different types, including skills in the use of applications and platforms, Internet connectivity, and even feelings of sadness or anxiety (Moralista & Oducado, 2020; Talidong & Toquero, 2020).

Confronting with new forms of teaching and lacking prior experience and alternative solutions, many teachers found it hard to come up with effective strategies to deliver online lessons, especially senior ones (Cataudella et al., 2021). Their challenges were numerous, including lack of technical support from their institutions, adoption to online teaching, and managing personal life with work life and mental stress (Kakkad, 2021; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2021; Teng & Wu, 2021). As the teaching and learning environment was new to many teachers, their biggest concern was the learners' interaction with content, peers, and instructors.

When being in the live online lessons, it was unclear how much learners gained from the teachers' live delivery of the content and the pre-uploaded materials. Due to the emergency of online teaching, most lecturers just used online meeting platforms like Zoom or Google Workspace to deliver the lesson content and upload reading materials designed for conventional lessons (Baber 2020). The live presentation of lesson content and provision of reading materials tended to be one-way and unsystematic (Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2021). Hence, the quality of learning from these materials could have been below teachers' expectations.

Regarding learners' interaction with teachers and peers, the commonly used online meeting applications (e.g., Zoom) allowed the students to interact with each other in breakout rooms. However, there were numerous unanswered questions about the quality of their discussions. Students might not have been used to this way of online discussion before and faced numerous problems such as the lack of direct communication and human touch, privacy, and account security (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Sobaih et al., 2021). Some teachers used social media groups such as Facebook or WhatsApp to promote more interaction with students, adding to the already heavy workload. In addition, due to the emergency, not all teachers were trained in instructional design to foster live interaction between the teachers and students as well as among the students, meeting the need for different learning styles (Maheshwari, 2021; Sobaih et al., 2021). The new (online) teaching environment did cause considerable ambiguity and complication to the teachers (

Teacher satisfaction in online teaching is also closely related to their students. Researchers have established a positive correlation between faculty satisfaction and student performance and engagement (Kuo et al., 2014; Shenoy et al., 2020). Teachers are more encouraged when they know their online teaching is better than traditional sessions and vice versa (Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2021; Shenoy et al., 2020). Barriers to student satisfaction during the pandemic included technical and security problems when using Zoom or Google Meet (Nambiar, 2020). Many students even experienced mental and physical health issues because of the lockdown and social distancing rules (Baloran, 2020; Nambiar, 2020).

In summary, teacher satisfaction in online learning depends on several factors, which can be classified into those related to institutions, students, and teachers themselves. Teachers were forced to use online meeting applications during the pandemic to deliver online lessons. While some were familiar with this mode of teaching, others found it challenging to navigate. There have been some studies in the world and Vietnam on this issue, but there has not been an agreement on the key factors that affect Vietnamese university lecturers. Hence, this study aims to add to what has already been known and is still missing in the literature about compulsory online teaching in Vietnam, where technological development is not as advanced as in developed countries, especially the use of copyrighted applications.

The current study was guided by a conceptual framework that includes the key factors influencing teacher satisfaction with online teaching (Allen & Seaman, 2015; Cho & Cho, 2016). These factors were broken into teacher, student-, and institution-related issues. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study.

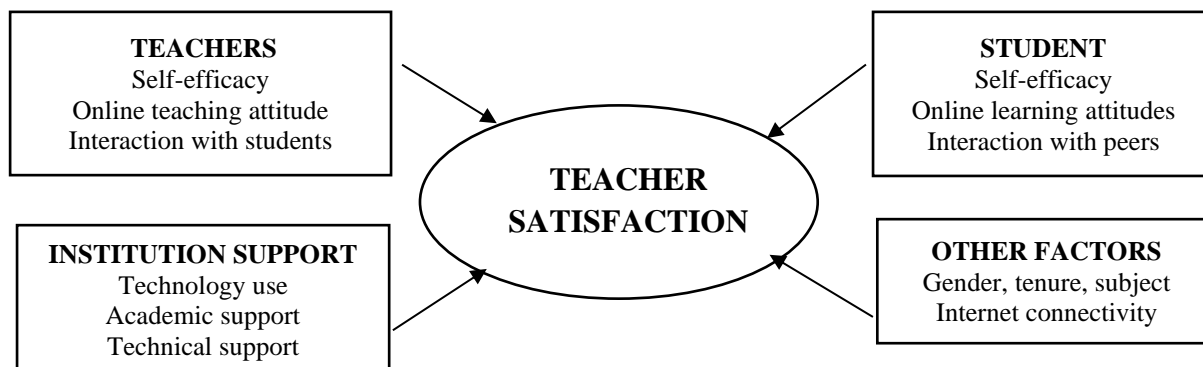


Figure 1. Study's conceptual framework

To fulfil the purpose of the study, the following two research questions were developed:

**Question 1.** Which factors influenced university teachers' satisfaction during the live online teaching due to Covid-19 in Vietnam?

**Question 2.** What were the teachers' experiences during the live online teaching due to Covid-19 in Vietnam?

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Participants and online courses

Purposive sampling was used to approach participants. Research participants included 206 teachers from a Vietnamese university. Participants belonged to two groups of teachers. The first group taught foreign languages like English, Chinese, and Japanese, while the second group taught business administration, information technology, and banking and finance in English and French. Participants began teaching online in late February 2020 when Vietnam banned large gatherings and exercised social distancing measures. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1.

Participants' demographic characteristics

Information	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Female	176	85.4
Male	30	14.6
Online teaching experience		
Yes	59	28.6
No	147	71.4
Teaching subject		
Practice-based	129	62.6
Theory-based	77	37.4
Teaching tenure (years)		
Under 5	42	20.4
6- 10	61	29.6
11-15	65	31.6
16-20	32	15.5
Over 20	6	2.9
Internet connectivity		
Unstable	21	10.2
Stable	183	89.8



There were a lot more female than male teachers at the participating university (85.4 versus 14.6), and the majority of them (71.4) had not experienced online teaching before the outbreak of Covid-19. As a language university, more teachers taught practice-based subjects (e.g., language skills, interpreting and translation) than theory-based ones (like the history of the Vietnamese Communist Party, foreign literature, macroeconomics). More than half of the teachers had 6–15 years of teaching experience, but less than 3% had been at the university for more than 20 years. A vast majority of them (89.8%) also enjoyed stable Internet connectivity during the online teaching time. Teachers stayed at home in Hanoi, the capital city, or their hometowns to deliver online lessons via Zoom or Google Workspace. Except for physical education, lessons were taught online for all language practice courses, interpreting and translation (for language majors), and specialized courses (for non-language majors).

### *3.2. The survey instrument and data collection*

A questionnaire was developed with relevant demographic variables and factors influencing online teaching satisfaction in a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree). The questionnaire development process involved two stages. In stage 1, questionnaires from past studies were documented, translated into Vietnamese, and scrutinized. An expert judgment session was organized to ensure the instrument's content validity. Eight teachers involved in online teaching during the pandemic were invited to read the questions and comment on whether the questions were appropriate for this study. Modifications, including item deletions or additions and wording changes, assured question suitability. In stage 2, the questionnaire was piloted on ten more teachers who were teaching online at the time of the pandemic (these teachers were excluded from participating in this study). The questionnaire contained both closed- and open-ended items. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha values, calculated based on the pilot sample of this study, indicated that the developed items were reliable (0.93).

All online teachers at the institution were emailed an invitation to participate in the study. About 400 teachers received information about the study and a link to the online experience and satisfaction survey hosted in Google Forms. To increase the response rate, reminders were also emailed to the online teachers. After ten days, 217 responses were received from the teachers, accounting for 54% of the targeted teachers. However, after cleaning the data by deleting invalid responses, only 206 were usable for analysis, accounting for 52% of the total number of the targeted teachers.

After the initial analysis of quantitative data, the researchers developed semi-structured interview questions and conducted face-to-face interviews with five teachers from different faculties of the university on a voluntary basis. This process aimed to explore, among other things, teachers' opinions about the results of quantitative data analysis. The interviews were conducted when the teachers resumed their offline teaching thanks to the ease of Covid-19 in Vietnam at the time. Interviewed participants' anonymity was protected by using pseudonyms (Lahman et al., 2015). The researchers also exploited answers to the open-ended question. Around 30% of the survey participants provided additional comments in the questionnaire.

### *3.3. Data analysis*

The quantitative data were analyzed using both simple descriptive statistics like frequency analysis and inferential statistics with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 22. Descriptive analyses were conducted to present each participant's basic information; an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to investigate factors influencing teacher satisfaction in online teaching. EFA was used to reduce a large number of variables in the

questionnaire down to smaller groups of factors. After the groups of factors were identified, correlation analysis was performed to explore the relationships among the groups of factors. Then, multiple regression analysis was conducted to find the influence of these groups of factors on teacher satisfaction. In addition, t-test analyses were performed to explore the differences and effects of teachers' backgrounds (i.e., gender, online teaching experience, teaching subjects, and Internet connectivity) on their overall satisfaction with online teaching.

Qualitative data were processed using content analysis (Miles et al., 2014). A triangulation technique was adopted in which the quantitative results were supported and explained by findings from the qualitative data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The analytical analyses mentioned above were usually employed in past studies about online teaching and learning satisfaction (Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2021; Kuo et al., 2014; Zaili et al., 2019). The following sections present key findings of the analysis.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Results of quantitative data analysis

#### 4.1.1. Exploratory factor analysis

An EFA using SPSS was conducted in order to answer the first research question about the factors influencing university teachers' satisfaction during the live online teaching due to Covid-19 in Vietnam. The 22 items that influenced teacher satisfaction were subjected to this analysis. Prior to performing the EFA, the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of 14 coefficients of 0.3 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.718, exceeding the recommended value of 0.6; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity indicated statistical significance. These findings support the factorability of the correlation matrix. EFA revealed the presence of four components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 28.99%, 21.35%, 13.92%, and 9.39% of the variance, respectively.

Oblimin rotation aided in the interpretation of these four components. The rotated solution revealed the presence of a simple structure with four components, demonstrating several strong loadings and most variables loading substantially on only one component. The interpretation of the four components was consistent with a study on factors influencing teacher satisfaction in online courses with high loadings on components like technology, institution support, and the online course. The Cronbach alpha values for the retained items were over 0.70, suggesting acceptable internal consistency. A summary of factor loadings is provided in Table 2.

Table 2.  
Rotated factor loadings for constructs

Factor	Item	Component				Cronbach alpha
		1	2	3	4	
Online interaction	Frequency of learner-learner interaction	.915				.777
	The efficiency of learner-learner interaction	.890				.775
	The efficiency of instructor-learner interaction	.772				.778
	Frequency of instructor-learner interaction	.763				.778
Learner efficacy	Learner computer skills		.888			.795
	Learner Internet skills		.846			.795
	Learner language competence		.696			.796
	Learner autonomy		.692			.793
	Learner attitude towards online learning		.686			.792
Institution support	Academic support from the university			.924		.772
	Technical support from the university			.921		.784
	Academic support from faculty			.887		.783
Technology	Instructor technological skills				.821	.785
	Online learning application				.743	.789
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.						
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.						
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.						

Data in Table 2 shows that the factor loadings were on four components: online interaction, learner efficacy, institution support and technology, reflectively. These four components explained 73.66% of the variance. Data from Table 2 reveals that the first component concerned factors were related to online interaction, specifically frequency and efficiency of interaction between the teachers and students and among the students. The second component was related to learner efficacy: their computer and Internet skills as well as learning autonomy and attitude towards online learning. The third component was about institution support, both academic and technical. The fourth component concerned the technology, specifically applications used and the teachers' skills in using them for online teaching. The highest loading was on academic support from the university (0.924), and the lowest was on the learners' attitude towards online learning (0.686).

#### 4.1.2. Correlation

Table 3.  
Correlation between variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Interaction	1	.012	.293**	.394**	.614**
2. Learner efficacy		1	.057	.117	-.098
3. Institution support			1	.245**	.366**
4. Technology				1	.478**
5. Satisfaction					1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows the Pearson correlation coefficients between the variables. Three components (interaction, institution support and technology) were positively related to satisfaction ( $p < 0.01$ ), but learner efficacy (e.g., computer, Internet skills and autonomy) was not. Data in Table 2 indicates that interaction had the most significant correlation ( $r = 0.614$ ) with teacher interaction, followed by technology ( $r=0,478$ ), whereas institution support recorded the smallest association with teacher satisfaction ( $r = 0.366$ ). Correlations between the independent variables were at small and medium levels (from 0.012 to 0.394).

#### 4.1.3. Regression

A multiple regression analysis was performed to see how much the independent variables predicted teacher satisfaction. Before conducting regression analysis, the suitability of data was assessed. The distribution of the data showed no extreme outliers for the data set. The tests also showed that the variables met the assumption of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity (Pallant, 2011). After the entry of the four variables, the total variance explained by the model (adjusted R square) was 0.48, which indicates that the model explains 48% of the variance.

Table 4.

Multiple regression of predictors of teacher satisfaction

	Beta	T	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)		3.470	.001		
1. Interaction	.458	8.144	.000	.802	1.246
2. Learner efficacy	-.145	-2.854	.005	.984	1.017
3. Institution support	.173	3.251	.001	.893	1.120
4. Technology	.272	4.883	.000	.816	1.226
R square = 0.479; F = 48.19 (4:206). Sig. F = 0.000					

Table 4 shows that all four components were significant predictors in explaining teacher satisfaction. Comparing the contribution of each independent variable, Table 4 shows that when the variance explained by all other variables in the model was controlled, interaction made the strongest positive contribution to explaining satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.46$ ). Beta values for three other variables (technology, institution support, and learner efficacy) indicated smaller positive contributions of 0.27, 0.17, and -0.15, respectively.

#### 4.1.4. T-test

An independent sample t-test was conducted to explore if demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, prior online teaching experience) influenced teacher satisfaction. Table 5 shows that gender and prior online language teaching experience did not predict teacher satisfaction ( $p = 0.41$  and  $0.74$ , respectively). There was no significant difference in scores for females ( $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ) and males ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ;  $t(206) = 0.83$ ,  $p = 0.41$ , two-tailed) in online teaching satisfaction. Similarly, there was no significant difference in scores for teachers who had no prior experience in online language teaching ( $M = 3.51$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ) and those with prior experience ( $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ;  $t(206) = -0.34$ ,  $p = 0.74$ , two-tailed). However, the teaching subjects did affect satisfaction. Those who taught theory-based subjects ( $M = 3.64$ ) were more satisfied than those who taught practice-based subjects ( $M = 3.45$ ). The magnitude of the difference, nevertheless, was small ( $\eta^2 = 0.02$ ). Similarly, teachers with better Internet connectivity ( $M = 3.56$ ) were more satisfied than those with weak connectivity ( $M = 3.19$ ). Again, the magnitude of the difference was small ( $\eta^2 = 0.03$ ).

Table 5.  
Effects of demographic characteristics on teacher satisfaction

	Online teaching satisfaction							
		Levene	N	M	SD	t	Sig.	Eta
Gender	<i>Female</i>	0.080	176	3.53	0.594	0.829	0.408	
	<i>Male</i>		30	3.43	0.728			
Prior online teaching experience	<i>No</i>	0.569	147	3.51	0.623	-0.339	0.735	
	<i>Yes</i>		59	3.54	0.597			
Teaching subjects	<i>Practice-based</i>	0.439	129	3.45	0.612	-2.128	0.035	0.02
	<i>Theory-based</i>		77	3.64	0.605			
Internet connectivity	<i>Not stable</i>	1.34	21	3.19	0.602	2.63	0.009	0.03
	<i>Stable</i>		185	3.56	0.606			

The study also utilized the ANOVA technique to explore differences among groups of teachers with different tenures (under five years, 6-10 years, etc.) and online teaching satisfaction. The results of the analyses did not show significant differences ( $p > 0.05$ ). In summary, only two factors were significant predictors of teacher online teaching satisfaction among the controlling variables: the subjects (theory or practice) and Internet connectivity.

#### 4.2. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative results

In order to answer the second research question about the lecturers' experience in the live online teaching amid Covid-19, the researchers determined the answers to the open-ended survey question and semi-structured interviews. The following section presents the triangulation of the results of analyzing two datasets related to the lecturers' compulsory online teaching experience during Covid-19.

First, the quantitative analysis revealed that the usefulness of teacher-student and student-student interaction was a significant predictor of lecturer satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.458$ ). In the interviews, all the interviewed teachers confirmed this finding, adding that:

*Interaction between teachers and students is always decisive in both online and offline environments. (HNUGV05)*

Online interaction had some advantages over offline interactions, revealing that:

*... this interaction was not interrupted by student-student interaction. (HNUGV901)*

Many students were more confident in giving answers by tapping on the chat windows. In fact, students were often shy in an offline context. The online lessons were also interconnected with other resources so both teachers and students could read and comment via the chat window. Online interaction in practice-based lessons increased, which encouraged the first-year students to be more active in establishing a habit of chatting with teachers online.

However, in the survey, some teachers commented that the nature of online teaching (sitting for a long time in front of the computer) limited their interaction with students in comparison with an offline context. One teacher stated:

*It is noisy if all students turn on their microphones at the same time. (HNUGV82)*

Another teacher wrote that:

*Teachers have to prepare carefully for their online lessons and teach for the whole day with a lot more workload. Their interaction with the students becomes limited. (HNUGV 32)*

Technical constraints like poor microphone sound or blurred facial expressions resulted in low-quality teacher-student interaction. However, it is interesting that many students reported microphone malfunctions only when requested to speak.

The second and third significant predictors of online teaching satisfaction were the technology, specifically applications used for online teaching and teacher skills in using them ( $\beta = 0.272$ ) and institution support ( $\beta = 0.17$ ). Some teachers answered that these skills were essential regarding the teachers' technical skills in operating Zoom and Google Meets. They were satisfied with both the application and training provided to them before and during the online teaching period. One interviewee stated:

*Teachers with good Internet self-efficacy can search for information and support their students to the best of their ability. On the other hand, those with weaker technical abilities find it hard to deliver a lesson effectively. (HNUGV901)*

In answers to the open-ended question, the participants appreciated the support:

*I think the applications were very useful, and different departments collaborated well in supporting teachers. (HNUGV74)*

*I hope to get more support from the university, especially Internet connectivity (ID30)  
... financial support. (HNUGV11)*

Interestingly, the quantitative data findings revealed that student self-efficacy was the weakest predictor of teacher satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.145$ ). Indeed, teachers mentioned a few students' technical problems during the lesson, including the failure of a microphone:

*... when the teachers asked them to practice speaking, some did not have a microphone or had a malfunctioning one. (HNUGV905)*

Another interviewee noted:

*During the lesson, many students accidentally turned on their microphones, which caused much noise. Other students did not know where the noise was coming from either. How could I teach in that situation? (HNUGV903)*

In answers to the open-ended question, many teachers mentioned the need to provide student support for Internet connectivity:

*Students need to be supported with stable Internet connectivity. (HNUGV69)*

Another teacher elaborated:

*Sometimes students had problems with Internet connectivity, resulting in their failure to attend the lesson. So, for online teaching to be effective, it is necessary to pay attention to teachers' facilities and students' Internet connectivity. (HNUGV39)*

After reviewing participants' answers to this open-ended question, it was found that they might have mistaken students' Internet self-efficacy with Internet connectivity. This was confirmed in the results of the t-test (see Table 5), which indicated that more stable connectivity resulted in more satisfied teachers. This was complemented in the interviews whereby the teachers stated that Internet connectivity had a decisive impact on the quality of learning outcomes and student motivation. Some stressed:

*Internet connectivity needs to be stable for good communication, studying content, providing feedback, and sharing opinions from students. (HNUGV902)*

*Some students were kicked out five to six times during a one-and-one-half hour lesson; hence, they were distraught. Some of them ceased their attendance after experiencing technical errors. (HNUGV901)*

Finally, the result of the t-test indicated that teachers' prior experience in online teaching did not predict their satisfaction during the pandemic's emergency teaching format (see Table 5). Indeed, online teaching was an emergency response to the coronavirus; therefore, teachers had to be familiar with online teaching and had to adapt to new teaching environments. Some of the teachers commented on this phenomenon:

*I think this is understandable because we had to teach online due to COVID-19. (HNUGV905)*

*I think this is logical because we have only been teaching offline in Vietnam. We have only just begun to apply online teaching, and it is a good beginning. (HNUGV902)*

*... offline teaching has already met students' needs, or there are differences among teachers. For example, I am not a fan of technology, so I have not taught online. This time, it was a must, no matter if I liked it or not. (HNUGV904)*

One teacher noted that online teaching via online meeting platforms was, in fact, not a fully functional LMS. Therefore, the technical skills needed to deliver the online lessons were not complicated. In answers to open-ended questions and interviews, most participants valued the technical support received during the online teaching period, especially the less experienced teachers.

*I think teachers with weak technical skills and low Internet self-efficacy will find it easier and have more confidence if they get online support from someone. The more satisfied they are, the better their lessons. (HNUGV901)*

*The department and university were ready to listen and respond instantly to any problems faced by the teachers. (HNUGV905)*

One interviewee used an interesting metaphor to describe this support:

*It is like when you are drowning and receive a lifeboat from someone. You can get to shore. (HNUGV903)*

The analyses of quantitative and qualitative data in this study reveal that factors impacting satisfaction with online teaching during the pandemic were related to teachers' interactions with students, technical performance, student behaviour, and support from the institution. The study results show that teachers can adapt when forced to teach online. However, the teachers noted that blended learning models ensure the quality of learning outcomes.

*I think a combination of online and offline learning will be more flexible and effective because each mode has its own advantages. (HNUGV76)*

*In the future, online teaching should be blended with offline at [name of institution], especially for theory-based courses. (HNUGV61)*

*... combine online with offline learning, even in non-pandemic situations. (HNUGV37)*

As mentioned in this study, online teaching during the coronavirus pandemic occurred through live video conferencing applications. An investment in a fully operational LMS will ensure the long-term effects of online learning.

## 5. Discussion of results

The current study aimed to explore the factors that influenced university lecturers' satisfaction in a live online learning context at a Vietnamese university with the use of a mixed-methods approach built on data collected from a survey and interviews with 206 university lecturers. The study results indicated that online interaction had the strongest impact, followed by institution support and technology-related issues (lecturers' technical skills and applications used). Internet connectivity and the subject taught (theory or practice-based) also had an influence on teacher satisfaction. In what follows, the study results will be compared to the findings of the previous studies.

First, during live online teaching, interactions (learner-teacher, learner-learner, learner-content) were crucial in teacher satisfaction. This result is consistent with other studies, suggesting that teacher-student interaction plays a vital role in online learning (Kuo et al., 2014; Lumsden, 2017). However, other studies do not support the current result that noted teachers' concerns about interactions with students in an online environment (Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2021; Maheshwari, 2021; Moralista & Oducado, 2020). In this regard, earlier research revealed that teachers played multiple roles in promoting interpersonal interaction in an online environment through acts like regularly posting messages and announcements encouraging students to share problems and concerns through the use of different social media (Cho & Cho, 2016; Sobaih et al., 2021).

However, due to the emergency, many teachers were not trained in these pedagogical skills. It was also clear from the current study results that teachers had many difficulties connecting to their students during the live online learning amid Covid-19. This finding is in agreement with the results of a study by Sobaih et al. (2021), which showed that several barriers were identified in teacher-learner interaction. Due to technical and pedagogical constraints, the teachers were not fully trained to promote online interaction with the students and redesign teaching materials to suit the online environment. This resulted in a one-way interaction pattern (Baber, 2020; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2021). Teachers' concerns about the limited interactions were particularly relevant because in language learning, students' interactions with peers, both verbally and non-verbally, play an essential role in their developing language proficiency (Pham, 2022).

Second, in the current study, technology had a statistical influence on teacher satisfaction, which supports the findings of past research indicating that teachers tend to be more satisfied with online teaching if their technical skills are good and vice versa (Ayu & Pratiwi, 2021; Shenoy et al., 2020). Teachers in this study managed to conduct the live online lessons despite their lack of prior experience in online teaching. This finding agrees with the results of earlier studies on teachers' perceptions of online teaching both in a normal situation and during the Covid-19 pandemic period, which revealed that teachers could adapt to an online environment despite their lack of prior experience (Kakkad, 2021; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2021; Shenoy et al., 2020; Wingo et al., 2017). Nonetheless, the current study participants were concerned about the students' technical difficulties (i.e., Internet connectivity, a broken microphone [intentionally or unintentionally]). This result is supported by findings of previous studies, which posited that technical skills, access to equipment, and abilities to use technology were



teachers' concerns in online teaching (Kakkad, 2021; Dhawan, 2020; Sobaih et al., 2021; Teng & Wu, 2021).

Third, it was revealed from this study that supports from institutions had a substantial impact on teacher satisfaction. This result agrees with the findings of some other researchers, which indicated that support from institutions plays a critical role in teacher satisfaction and the success of an online course, especially the provision of technical and pedagogical training (Cataudella et al., 2021; Dhawan, 2020; Wingo et al., 2017). The results of this study also corroborate the ideas of previous research, which stated that teachers value support from institutions even if they must teach online and endure more workload due to subjective reasons (Kakkad, 2021; Lapitan et al., 2021).

The result of the t-test indicated that gender and prior experience in online teaching did not predict teacher satisfaction during the pandemic's emergency teaching format. Indeed, online teaching was an emergency response to the coronavirus; therefore, all teachers had to be familiar with online teaching and adapt to new teaching environments. This finding partially agrees with the results of a study by Kakkad (2021), which indicated a significant difference between gender and satisfaction with online teaching (p.35). However, the above finding contradicts the results of a study by Cataudella et al. (2021), revealing that teachers with no-prior online teaching experience failed to find active solutions to online teaching problems.

## 6. Conclusion, Implications and Limitations

The methodological approach in this study is based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered from a survey and semi-structured interviews with teachers who taught online during the coronavirus pandemic in Vietnam. Qualitative findings supported results from the quantitative analysis. The study revealed three main groups of factors that influenced teacher satisfaction: (1) learner-learner and learner-instructor interactions; (2) technology; and (3) support from the institution. While teachers appreciated the advantages of online teaching, this study found that they believed blended learning ensured higher-quality learning outcomes.

The coronavirus pandemic has caused negative impacts on all facets of our lives. It has also created opportunities for countries to embrace digital transformations in education and training (Minh, 2020; MOETb, 2020). In this context, the findings from this study add a few implications to the current practice of online teaching and learning in Vietnam. First, when implementing an online learning program, attention should be paid to the usefulness or effectiveness of interactions between teachers and students. While online interaction differs from its offline classroom counterpart, teachers continue to facilitate the process. In this regard, teachers should be trained to design suitable learning materials and prompt students to think and respond effectively. Blended learning should be implemented instead of relying on the emergency delivery of content as experienced during the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, the synchronous interaction time should be designated for questions and answers. These efforts will promote the self-regulation of the learner, which was only at a medium level (Luu, 2022).

Second, all universities in Vietnam rolled out online learning during the pandemic to sustain education. However, teachers, students, and institutions faced many problems, including technical constraints, due to the emergency nature of the work. At the same time, Internet connectivity throughout Vietnam and the technological limitations of the applications created a challenging online learning experience (Maheshwari, 2021). For long-term delivery, institutions must incorporate advanced technologies and updated educational tools into their

formal curriculum and implement a blended learning model to ensure the quality of teaching and learning (Daniel, 2020; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2021; Lapitan et al., 2021).

Third, institutions must consider several factors when organizing their online teaching and learning environment. Institutions must select online platforms, applications, and training programs that are familiar to teachers. Some teachers, especially those with more exposure to technology, may find it easier to use an interface, move between Web pages, and organize online groups or pair-work. On the other hand, teachers with limited experience in technology may struggle with the new platforms. Hence, teachers will appreciate professional development opportunities and/or continuous training and support from the institutions, especially online teaching experience (Cataudella et al., 2021; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2021; Ngo, 2021).

The findings in this study are not free of limitations. First, the data in this study came from teachers. To see a fuller picture of online teaching and learning during this historic pandemic, future research should include an in-depth investigation of the perception of learners, teachers, and education administrators. Second, although the number of participants in this study was relatively large (206), it was conducted at a social science university. Therefore, the teachers may have had lower technological skills than in technical settings. The results of the study cannot be generalized without further research. Third, more qualitative data should be collected to explore online teaching and learning issues, including teachers' online class management, learners' self-regulation, and support for teachers and students in online education during troubled times.

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## Perceptions of Vietnamese EFL High School Teachers and Students towards English as a Lingua Franca

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** English as a lingua franca (ELF), gifted and non-gifted high schools, high school EFL teachers and students, perceptions.

The purpose of this study is to identify the perceptions of Vietnamese EFL in-service teachers and students from gifted versus non-gifted high schools towards English as a lingua franca (ELF). In this quantitative study, a questionnaire was utilized to collect data that was then analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results show that both Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students had positive perceptions towards ELF in general and towards each of the dimensions of ELF in particular. Additionally, there were some statistically significant differences between the perceptions of sub-groups of Vietnamese EFL teachers and students from gifted versus non-gifted high schools. The study contributes to the literature of the field and assists policymakers when it comes to formulating policy to enhance English communication skills at the high school level, particularly in the Vietnamese context. In addition, the current study is beneficial for teachers and learners to have an insight into how they should teach and learn English to communicate effectively.

### Introduction

Globalization has given rise to changes in a myriad of life's facets. The phenomenon also popularizes English as a medium of communication worldwide. This means that the number of non-native English speakers outweighs that of native English speakers. The fact that people interact with partners from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds rather than English is prominent (Curran & Chern, 2017). Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), to satisfy the world's new requirements for employees to be fluent in communicative English, has also driven the focus from teaching to test to teaching to communicate. The conventional notion of teaching standard English pronunciation (American English or British English) as well as the idea of using only English in the classroom has no longer been considered dominant. English, in this case, is used as a medium of communication between people who come from different first language backgrounds, which is so-called English as a lingua franca (ELF) (Jenkins, 2012)

In recent decades, a dramatic increase in the ELF interest has been internationally extended thanks to the preliminary works done by Jenkins (2000) and Seidlhofer (2001). Researchers have also driven their attention to ELF in the Vietnamese context since the first decade of the new millennium. Moreover, one of the important missions of the Vietnamese National Foreign Languages Project is to prepare teachers and learners with sufficient occupational language skills, especially in the fields with free labor mobility within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations economic community (Ministry of Education of Vietnam, 2018). Apparently, English speaking competencies tested at schools may not satisfy the real needs of learners anymore (Butler, Lee & Peng, 2020). The urgent demand for these students to be able to communicate efficiently with non-native English speakers by using English has been officially recognized and put forward by the authority.

In addition, the jargon 'gifted students' or 'specialized students' have long been utilized to refer to students who achieve excellent academic results in specialized schools (or schools for the gifted) in Vietnam, which 'are established at upper secondary education level for pupils with outstanding achievements in learning to develop their aptitudes for certain subjects while assuring comprehensive general education.' (Vietnamese educational law, Art. 62, 2005). Every year, a gifted high school admits not more than 0.1% of the total population of the whole province (Decision 82, Art. 3, 2010). To be admitted to a high school for the gifted, students must take the 4-subject examination, including Maths, Vietnamese Literature, English, and the major. The minimum passing score for the major is set at 6.0/ 10.0. Moreover, while studying at a high school for the gifted, students who get the major Grade Point Average (GPA) of the total GPA lower than 6.5, or any other subjects lower than 5.0, will be expelled from the school. Obviously, with the pressure these students have to face, their perceptions are definitely different from those of their regular peers.

Therefore, exploring gifted versus non-gifted teachers' and students' perceptions of these changes is important. The present study contributes to the current literature of ELF with a more comprehensive understanding of high school teachers' and students' perceptions. Also, policymakers may consider the results of this study when framing policy for teaching English communication skills at the high school level. With this study, high school EFL learners and teachers are also more aware of how to teach and learn English so that learners can use English efficaciously in their future jobs.

## Literature review

### *English as a lingua franca*

For thousands of years, people who do not speak the same native language have longed for a language of communication, a lingua franca (Haberland, 2011). Ruth (2018) defines various use in ELF communication as the difference in using language forms and functions from the conventionalized standard language by English native speakers. EFL research also focuses on investigating the 'process of variation itself, on what motivates the variable use of linguistic

resources in the achievement of communicative purposes in different contexts of use' (Widdowson, 2015, p. 363). As Ruth (2018) states, a reconsideration of established concepts, such as the role and usefulness of norms and standards (Dewey, 2012; Widdowson, 2012), or the usefulness of linguistic categorization for actual language use (Osink-Teasdale, 2015) based on the research on the way linguistic resources are adapted in ELF contexts is required.

### *Relevant research on ELF and gifted students*

Although some of the key issues of ELF had been dealt with for decades, research into ELF has emerged only relatively recently (Shohamy & Hornberger, 2017). According to Kontra and Csizer (2011), the focus of ELF research is on two main aspects. The first targeted feature is the investigation of ELF's characteristics and use (Wu, Mauranen & Lei, 2020; Pang, 2020; Víctor & Lanteigne, 2020; Guohai & Geling, 2021). The second one is the exploration of the perceptions of language teachers and learners towards ELF (Yalçın, Bayyurt & Alahdab, 2020; Laitinen, 2020; Ambele & Boonsuk, 2020; Kim, 2021).

In the context of Vietnam, researchers have also paid attention to the phenomenon of ELF (Do, 2000; Ton & Pham, 2010; Tran & Moore, 2015; Ho & Nguyen, 2019; Yao, Garcia & Collins, 2019; Nguyen, 2019; Phan, 2020), especially on the attitudes of teachers and learners at tertiary level, though the number of studies is small. However, gifted students' perceptions have not received much attention from researchers. From the literature review, only a few of such studies can be found (Vu, 2011; Vu & Vu, 2012; Nguyen, Jin & Gross, 2013; Nguyen & Ngo, 2018). Vu (2011) examined gifted students' profiles and their perceptions towards a gifted program. Vu and Vu (2012) explored how gifted students recognized the effectiveness of the gifted program. Nguyen, Jin, and Gross (2013) investigated the Confucian values in Vietnamese gifted adolescents and their regular peers. Nguyen and Ngo (2018) conducted research on teachers' and students' perceptions towards English as a medium of instruction at a gifted high school in Central Vietnam. Apparently, a study on gifted students' perceptions of ELF would be a great contribution to the gap in the literature and the practical implementation of English language teaching at Vietnamese gifted high schools.

### *Research Gaps*

Apparently, most of the studies conducted on the perceptions towards ELF focus on teachers and students at tertiary level or pre-service teachers. Hardly can studies that focus on identifying the perceptions of in-service high school EFL teachers gifted and non-gifted students towards ELF be found on search engines worldwide, let alone in Vietnam. As a result, this study probes the identification of gifted versus non-gifted high school in-service ELF teachers' and students' perceptions towards ELF.

### *Research Questions*

Three research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How do Vietnamese high school EFL teachers perceive ELF? Are there any significant differences between EFL teachers' perceptions from gifted versus non-gifted high



schools towards ELF?

2. How do Vietnamese high school EFL students perceive ELF? Are there any significant differences between the perceptions of gifted versus non-gifted high school EFL students towards ELF?
3. Are there any significant differences between the perceptions of high school EFL teachers and students towards ELF?

## Methods

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

Vietnamese EFL in-service high school teachers and students from different high schools were the target subjects of this study. These participants partook in this study voluntarily, and their identities were kept confidential.

The Snowball sampling method was employed in this study. Finally, 125 teachers of English at high schools in Vietnam and 151 Vietnamese high school EFL students were recruited for the pilot study to examine whether the scale (Curran & Chern, 2017) still maintain reliability and validity when used for new samples. Next, 155 teachers (30 from gifted high schools and 125 from non-gifted high schools) and 300 students (141 from gifted high schools and 159 from non-gifted high schools) who had not participated in the pilot study were recruited for the main study.

### *Design of the Study*

The current study employed a quantitative research approach. The 20-item scale to measure pre-service teachers' perceptions of ELF developed by Curran and Chern (2017) was adapted. However, with new samples of Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students, the scale needed piloting.

125 teachers of English at high schools in Vietnam and 151 Vietnamese high school EFL students were recruited for the pilot study. The results showed that the Cronbach's alpha of the scale for teachers and students were .33 and .49, respectively, which was not satisfactory (Devellis, 2012). Therefore, some modifications were made. Firstly, there is a high probability that the cross-cultural measurement equivalence and construct validity of mixed-worded Likert format scales are challenged (Wong, Rindfleisch, & Burroughs, 2003); also, Sonderen, Sanderman and Coyne (2013) stated that reverse-worded items both did not help reduce response bias and even contaminated the data scores due to respondents' inattention and confusion. Secondly, through expert validity, one item was reported as 'confusing' since the phrase 'to be proficient speakers of English' could be understood in different ways depending on the background knowledge of different people. Hence, these items were deleted.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale after modification was .80 for teachers and .71 for students, indicating that the 11-item scale was reliable for use in the new context (Appendix 1).

Table 1 shows the newly modified scale's dimensions and its corresponding items.

**Table 1**

Dimensions and items of the newly modified scale

Codes	Dimensions	Items
D1	Models of English used in teaching materials	1, 2, 3
D2	Using English for communication	4, 5
D3	The role of language and culture in the English classroom	6, 7, 8, 9
D4	Language use in the classroom	10, 11

### *Data collection & analysis*

An online questionnaire was both randomly sent via email and posted on Facebook groups for Vietnamese EFL teachers and students.

This quantitative study manipulated SPSS statistical package 23. Descriptive statistics was operated to investigate the perceptions of high school EFL teachers and students' perceptions towards ELF. When the mean scores were higher than 3.5, they were classified as positive. When the mean scores were lower than 2.5, they were classified as negative. When the mean scores were from 2.5 to 3.5, they were classified as neutral. Also, an independent-samples *t-test* was used to identify whether the significant differences between perceptions of sub-groups towards ELF existed.

### **Findings**

**Research Question 1.** *How do Vietnamese high school EFL teachers perceive ELF? Are there any significant differences between EFL teachers' perceptions from gifted versus non-gifted high schools towards ELF?*

Generally speaking, as shown in Table 2, the participants possessed a positive perception towards four dimensions of ELF (D1: M = 3.63, SD = .79; D2: M = 3.67, SD = .71; D3: M = 4.20, SD = .57; D4: M = 3.73, SD = .75) and towards ELF as a whole (M = 3.86, SD = .43).

**Table 2**

Vietnamese high school EFL teachers' perceptions towards ELF

Dimensions	Vietnamese high school teachers (N = 155)	
	Mean	SD
Overall	3.86	.43
D1	3.63	.79
D2	3.67	.71
D3	4.20	.57
D4	3.73	.75

Table 3 presents Vietnamese high school EFL teachers' perceptions of ELF in more detail. A closer look at Table 3 illustrates that although these teachers believed the utmost importance of an English program was to prepare students for social interactions (Item 4: M = 4.59, SD = .61), they seemed to have a negative perception towards whether their students should be mainly

prepared to communicate with non-native English speakers (Item 5:  $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ). Another notable figure is Item 3 ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ), which presents a rather neutral perceptions of Vietnamese high school EFL teachers towards models of English used in teaching materials by both L1 and L2 speakers. Interestingly, all the items in D3 are among the highest-rated scores of all (Item 6:  $M = 4.27$ ,  $SD = .80$ ; Item 7:  $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = .62$ ; Item 8:  $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = .90$ ; Item 9:  $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = .84$ ).

**Table 3**

Perceptions of Vietnamese high school EFL teachers towards ELF in more detail

Items	Vietnamese high school teachers (N = 155)	
	Mean	SD
1	4.00	.94
2	3.72	1.09
3	3.16	1.15
4	4.59	.61
5	2.75	1.24
6	4.27	.80
7	4.39	.62
8	4.06	.90
9	4.07	.84
10	3.69	.98
11	3.79	.93
Overall	3.86	.43

An independent samples *t*-test was also conducted (Table 4). The results show that there was a significant difference in perceptions towards D1 between Vietnamese EFL teachers from gifted ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ) and non-gifted high schools ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ) conditions;  $t(153) = 2.41$ ,  $p = .02$ .

**Table 4**

Independent samples *t*-test analysis of the perceptions of Vietnamese teachers from gifted versus non-gifted high schools towards ELF

Constructs	Teachers from gifted high schools (N = 30)		Teachers from non-gifted high schools (N = 125)		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Overall	4.00	0.49	3.83	0.41	1.96	.051
D1	3.93	.88	3.55	.76	2.41	.02*
D2	3.73	.81	3.66	.69	.51	.62
D3	4.31	.49	4.17	.59	1.12	.25
D4	3.75	.80	3.73	.75	.09	.93

To investigate which items create this statistically significant difference, an independent samples *t*-test analysis was conducted for Items 1, 2, and 3. Table 5 presents the independent samples *t*-test analysis of the perceptions of Vietnamese teachers from gifted versus non-gifted high schools towards models of English used in teaching materials. The result shows there was significant difference in Item 3 between Vietnamese EFL teachers from gifted ( $M = 4.23$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) and non-gifted high schools ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) conditions;  $t(153) = 2.55$ ,  $p = .01$ .

**Table 5**

Independent samples t-test analysis of the perceptions of Vietnamese teachers from gifted versus non-gifted high schools towards models of English used in teaching materials

Items	Teachers from gifted high schools (N = 30)		Teachers from non-gifted high schools (N = 125)		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	4.23	.94	3.90	.94	1.52	.13
2	3.63	1.10	3.05	1.14	1.22	.22
3	4.23	.94	3.90	.94	2.55	.01*

**Research Question 2.** *How do Vietnamese high school EFL students perceive ELF? Are there any significant differences between the perceptions of gifted versus non-gifted high school EFL students towards ELF?*

In general, as shown in Table 6, the participants possessed a positive perception towards four dimensions of ELF (D1: M = 3.49, SD = .79; D2: M = 3.84, SD = .73; D3: M = 4.08, SD = .63; D4: M = 3.79, SD = .93) and towards ELF as a whole (M = 3.82, SD = .52).

**Table 6**

Perceptions of Vietnamese high school EFL students towards ELF

Dimensions	Vietnamese high school students (N = 300)	
	Mean	SD
Overall	3.82	.52
D1	3.47	.79
D2	3.84	.73
D3	4.08	.63
D4	3.79	.93

Table 7 presents the mean and SD of Vietnamese high school students' perceptions towards ELF in more detail. The most notable feature for the first three items is that English spoken by a range of native speakers seemed to be most favored by these students (Item 1: M = 3.74, SD = 1.04). Besides, like the teachers, although the students believed the utmost importance of an English program was to prepare students for social interactions (Item 4: M = 4.54, SD = .69), they seemed to have a rather neutral perception towards whether their students should be mainly prepared to communicate with non-native English speakers (Item 5: M = 3.13, SD = 1.20). Another considerable feature is the two second-highest-rated items belonging to D3 that indicate the student's interest in sharing their own cultural values and learning about intercultural communication in the classroom (Item 6: M = 4.38, SD = .82; Item 7: M = 4.29, SD = .79).

**Table 7**

Perceptions of Vietnamese high school students towards ELF in more detail

Items	Vietnamese high school students (N = 300)	
	Mean	SD
1	3.73	1.04
2	3.51	1.11
3	3.17	1.22
4	4.54	.69
5	3.13	1.20
6	4.38	.82
7	4.29	.79
8	3.68	1.04
9	3.95	.92
10	3.77	1.15
11	3.81	1.00
Overall	3.82	.52

An independent samples *t*-test was also conducted (Table 8). The results show that there was a significant difference in perceptions towards D2 between Vietnamese gifted high school EFL students ( $M = 3.74$ ,  $SD = .69$ ) and Vietnamese non-gifted high school EFL students ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = .76$ ) conditions;  $t(298) = -2.26$ ,  $p = .024$ .

**Table 8**Independent samples *t*-test analysis of the perceptions of students from gifted versus non-gifted high schools towards ELF

Dimensions	Students from gifted high schools (N = 141)		Students from non-gifted high schools (N = 159)		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Overall	3.80	.47	3.83	.56	-.40	.69
D1	3.46	.78	3.48	.81	-.16	.87
D2	3.74	.69	3.93	.76	-2.26	.024*
D3	4.13	.54	4.03	.70	1.31	.19
D4	3.73	.92	3.84	.95	-1.01	.31

An independent samples *t*-test analysis was conducted for Items 4 and 5. Table 9 presents the independent samples *t*-test analysis of the perceptions of students from gifted versus non-gifted high schools towards using English for communication. The result shows there was significant difference in Item 5 between Vietnamese gifted high school EFL students ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) and Vietnamese non-gifted EFL high school students ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) conditions;  $t(298) = -2.40$ ,  $p = .017$ .

**Table 9**

Independent samples t-test analysis of the perceptions of students from gifted versus non-gifted high schools towards using English for communication

Items	Students from gifted high schools (N = 141)		Students from non-gifted high schools (N = 159)		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
4	4.52	.70	4.57	.67	-.61	.54
5	2.96	1.15	3.29	1.23	-2.40	.017*

**Research Question 3.** *Are there any significant differences between the perceptions of high school EFL teachers and students towards ELF?*

An independent samples *t-test* was conducted to compare perceptions towards English as a lingua franca between Vietnamese high school EFL students and teachers (Table 10). The result shows that there was significant difference in perceptions towards D1 between Vietnamese high school EFL teachers (M = 3.63, SD = .79) and Vietnamese high school EFL students (M = 3.47, SD = .79) conditions;  $t(312) = 1.98, p = .049$ . In addition, there was significant difference in perceptions towards D2 between Vietnamese high school EFL teachers (M = 3.67, SD = .71) and Vietnamese high school EFL students (M = 3.84, SD = .73) conditions;  $t(453) = -2.29, p = .023$ . Lastly, there was significant difference in perceptions towards D3 between Vietnamese high school EFL teachers (M = 4.20, SD = .57) and Vietnamese high school EFL students (M = 4.08, SD = .63) conditions;  $t(453) = 2.05, p = .041$ .

**Table 10**

Independent samples t-test analysis of perceptions of Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students towards ELF

Dimensions	High school teachers (N = 155)		High school students (N = 300)		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Overall	3.86	.43	3.82	.52	1.07	.287
D1	3.63	.79	3.47	.79	1.98	.049*
D2	3.67	.71	3.84	.73	-2.29	.023*
D3	4.20	.57	4.08	.63	2.05	.041*
D4	3.74	.75	3.79	.93	-.61	.541

An independent samples *t-test* analysis was conducted for items 1, 2, and 3 (Table 11). The result shows there was significant difference in Item 1 between Vietnamese high school EFL teachers (M = 4.00, SD = .94) and Vietnamese high school EFL students (M = 3.73, SD = 1.04) conditions;  $t(453) = 2.76, p = .006$ .

**Table 11**

Independent samples t-test analysis of perceptions of Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students towards models of English used in teaching materials

Items	High school teachers (N = 155)		High school students (N = 300)		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	4.00	.94	3.73	1.04	2.76	.006**
2	3.72	1.09	3.51	1.11	1.92	.055
3	3.16	1.15	3.17	1.22	-.10	.92

An independent samples *t-test* analysis was conducted for items 4 and 5 (Table 12). The result shows there was significant difference in Item 5 between Vietnamese high school EFL teachers ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) and Vietnamese high school EFL students ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) conditions;  $t(453) = -3.15$ ,  $p = .002$ .

**Table 12**

Independent samples t-test analysis of perceptions of Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students towards using English for communication

Items	High school teachers (N = 155)		High school students (N = 300)		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
4	4.59	.61	4.54	.69	.77	.443
5	2.75	1.24	3.13	1.20	-3.15	.002**

An independent samples *t-test* analysis was conducted for items 6, 7, 8, and 9. Table 13 presents the independent samples t-test analysis of perceptions of Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students towards the role of language and culture in the English classroom. The result shows that there was significant difference in Item 8 between Vietnamese high school EFL teachers ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) and Vietnamese high school EFL students ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) conditions;  $t(453) = 3.89$ ,  $p = .000$ .

**Table 13**

Independent samples t-test analysis of perceptions of Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students towards the role of language and culture in the English classroom

Items	High school teachers (N = 155)		High school students (N = 300)		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
6	4.27	.80	4.38	.82	-1.32	.189
7	4.39	.62	4.29	.79	1.53	.126
8	4.06	.90	3.68	1.04	3.89	.000***
9	4.07	.84	3.95	.92	1.37	.172

### **A comparison between Vietnamese EFL teachers and students from gifted high schools.**

An independent samples *t-test* was conducted to compare perceptions towards English as a lingua franca between Vietnamese EFL students and teachers from gifted high schools (Table 14). The result shows that there was significant difference in perceptions towards ELF between Vietnamese EFL teachers from gifted high schools ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = .49$ ) and Vietnamese gifted

high school EFL students ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = .47$ ) conditions;  $t(169) = -2.07$ ,  $p = .04$ . Particularly, there was significant difference in perceptions towards D1 between Vietnamese high school EFL teachers ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = .88$ ) and Vietnamese high school EFL students ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = .78$ ) conditions;  $t(169) = -2.94$ ,  $p = .004$ .

**Table 14**

Independent samples t-test analysis of perceptions of Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students from gifted high schools towards ELF

Dimensions	Teachers from gifted high schools (N = 30)		Students from gifted high schools (N = 141)		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Overall	4.00	.49	3.80	.47	-2.07	.04*
D1	3.93	.88	3.46	.78	-2.94	.004**
D2	3.73	.81	3.74	.69	.03	.98
D3	4.31	.49	4.13	.54	-1.70	.09
D4	3.75	.80	3.73	.92	-.11	.91

An independent samples *t-test* analysis was conducted for all items (Table 15). The result shows there was significant difference in Item 1 between Vietnamese EFL teachers ( $M = 4.23$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) and Vietnamese EFL students ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) from gifted high schools conditions;  $t(169) = -2.13$ ,  $p = .035$ . Besides, the result shows there was significant difference in Item 3 between Vietnamese high school EFL teachers ( $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ) and Vietnamese high school EFL students ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) conditions;  $t(169) = -2.50$ ,  $p = .013$ . Similarly, there was significant difference in Item 8 between Vietnamese EFL teachers ( $M = 4.40$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) and Vietnamese EFL students ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = .92$ ) from gifted high schools conditions;  $t(169) = -3.53$ ,  $p = .001$ .

**Table 15**

Detailed independent samples t-test analysis of perceptions of Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students from gifted high schools towards ELF

Items	Teachers from gifted high schools (N = 30)		Students from gifted high schools (N = 141)		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	4.23	.94	3.80	1.02	-2.13	.035*
2	3.93	1.05	3.53	1.05	-1.91	.058
3	3.63	1.10	3.06	1.16	-2.50	.013*
4	4.57	.57	4.52	.70	-.36	.72
5	4.27	.58	2.96	1.15	.24	.81
6	4.27	.83	4.39	.79	.77	.44
7	4.27	.58	4.33	.74	.41	.68
8	4.40	.72	3.77	.92	-3.50	.001**
9	4.30	.75	4.01	.90	-1.62	.107
10	3.70	.95	3.68	1.17	-.10	.92
11	3.80	1.03	3.78	1.00	-.10	.92



### A comparison between Vietnamese EFL teachers and students from non-gifted high schools.

An independent samples *t-test* was conducted to compare perceptions towards ELF between Vietnamese EFL students and teachers from non-gifted high schools (Table 16). The result shows that there was significant difference in perceptions towards D2 between Vietnamese EFL teachers ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = .69$ ) and Vietnamese EFL students ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = .76$ ) from non-gifted high schools conditions;  $t(282) = 3.07$ ,  $p = .002$ .

**Table 16**

Independent samples t-test analysis of perceptions of Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students from non-gifted high schools towards ELF

Dimensions	Teachers from non-gifted high schools (N = 125)		Students from non-gifted high schools (N = 159)		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Overall	3.83	.41	3.83	.56	.08	.94
D1	3.55	.76	3.48	.81	.79	.431
D2	3.66	.69	3.93	.76	-3.07	.002**
D3	4.17	.59	4.03	.70	1.86	.064
D4	3.74	.75	3.84	.95	-1.03	.303

An independent samples *t-test* analysis was conducted for items 4 and 5. Table 17 presents the independent samples t-test analysis of perceptions of Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students from gifted high schools towards using English for communication. The result shows that there was significant difference in Item 5 between Vietnamese EFL teachers ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) and Vietnamese EFL students ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) from non-gifted high schools conditions;  $t(282) = -3.89$ ,  $p = .000$ .

**Table 17**

Independent samples t-test analysis of perceptions of Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students from gifted high schools towards using English for communication

Items	Teachers from non-gifted high schools (N = 125)		Students from non-gifted high schools (N = 159)		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
4	4.60	.62	4.57	.67	.44	.662
5	2.72	1.21	3.29	1.23	-3.89	.000***

## Discussion

### *Summary of the Findings*

Table 18 presents the summary of the findings in relation to the three research questions. Firstly, Vietnamese high school EFL teachers positively perceived ELF. There were no significant differences between the perceptions of Vietnamese EFL teachers from gifted versus non-gifted

high schools towards ELF in general and towards each of the dimensions, except D1 (Item 3). Secondly, Vietnamese high school EFL students positively perceived ELF. There were no significant differences between the perceptions of Vietnamese EFL students from gifted versus non-gifted high schools towards ELF in general and towards each of the dimensions, except D2 (Item 5). Finally, there were significant differences between the perceptions of Vietnamese EFL teachers and students from gifted high schools towards ELF (Items 1, 3, and 8) in general and towards D1 (Items 1, and 3) in particular. Besides, there was a significant difference between the perceptions of Vietnamese EFL teachers and students from non-gifted high schools towards D2 (Item 5). Also, there were substantial differences between the perceptions of Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students towards D1 (Items 1), D2 (Item 5), and D3 (Item 8).

**Table 18**

Summary of the findings from quantitative data

Research Questions		Findings
1	How do Vietnamese high school EFL teachers perceive ELF? Are there any significant differences between EFL teachers' perceptions from gifted versus non-gifted high schools towards ELF?	Positively D1 (Item 3)
2	How do Vietnamese high school EFL students perceive ELF? Are there any significant differences between the perceptions of gifted versus non-gifted high school EFL students towards ELF?	Positively D2 (Item 5)
3	Are there any significant differences between the perceptions of high school EFL teachers and students towards ELF?	High school teachers versus students - D1 (Item 3) - D2 (Item 5) - D3 (Item 8) Teachers versus students from gifted high schools - ELF (Items 1, 3, and 8) - D1 (Items 1, and 3) Teachers versus students from non-gifted high schools - D2 (Item 5)

### Models of English Used in Teaching Materials

The results show that native and non-native English speakers' English models were considered necessary to be included in English teaching materials by both Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students. Previous research shows similar conclusion (Curran & Chern, 2017; Tran & Ngo, 2017). These relationships may partly be explained by the advent of the Internet (Tsai, 2004). More specifically, Zhang (2021) suggested using local English media and local topics to vary the accent options. This result may also be explained by the fact that English teacher training programs at universities have started to offer courses related to English varieties to raise pre-service teachers' awareness of this issue. Besides, Vietnamese teachers underwent pronunciation training, thus also being confident in their role as a good model for students

(Quoc et al., 2021).

However, in this study's findings, models of native English speakers are still preferred by most. This is in accordance with the findings from the study on students and teachers at the tertiary level (Do, 2000; Ton & Pham, 2010; Tran & Moore, 2015). There are two possible explanations for this result. Firstly, paper-pencil exams, which are employed mostly all over the world, promote the use of certain native English models. Secondly, parents and society expect students to possess a native-like accent puts much pressure on students' efforts to imitate native English speakers. The influence of people in the broader public on the dominant use of native English models was also reported by Wang and Fang (2018).

One interesting finding is that there was a statistically significant difference in perceptions towards D1 between sub-groups of participants. Teachers and students working with more advanced English tend to support English varieties more strongly. However, the findings of the current study do not reinforce previous research. English minors who tended to work in business environments favored various models of English more than interns and English majors, most of whom would work in academia (Curran & Chern, 2017). A possible explanation for this might be because participants in Curran and Chern's study (2017) were from Taipei, a densely populated city with multi-national inhabitants, while the respondents in the current study who could hardly have any chance to communicate with foreigners in English regularly were mostly from a homogeneous small province in Vietnam. Thus, the personal experiences of using English led to the diversity in perceptions towards ELF (Sung, 2017).

### **Using English for Communication**

The current findings show that Vietnamese EFL teachers and students agreed on the ultimate purpose of learning English, which is communication. This result is in line with that from the research on Taiwanese pre-service teachers conducted by Curran and Chern (2017). Also, the purpose of using English to make friends with people all over the world was highly rated in the study by Tran et al. (2021). As stated above, a possible explanation for this might be the advances of modern technology, especially the Internet. However, in the current study, the idea of real-life communication seemed to be between Vietnamese students and native English speakers mainly. This difference can be partly explained by different living and working environments and the unawareness of the number of people speaking English classified based on Kachru's circle (1985). The Vietnamese participants had few chances to communicate with foreigners in English, and they did not even know that there were more non-native English speakers than native ones.

Notably, there was a statistically significant difference in perceptions towards using English for communication between Vietnamese gifted versus non-gifted high school EFL students, between Vietnamese EFL teachers and students from non-gifted high schools, and between Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students with the higher mean scores rated by Vietnamese non-gifted high school EFL students, Vietnamese EFL students from non-gifted high schools, and Vietnamese high school students respectively. Since this difference has not

been found elsewhere, the reason for this is not clear but it may have something to do with students' level of English and intrinsic motivation related to future jobs. Not like non-gifted students who study general English and want to focus on communication, gifted students have to study more advanced English; hence, for them, the purposes of learning English are both for communication and for academic use. Also, compared with teachers who expect their students to perform well in academic exams, students are more open to the purpose of learning English for communication with the hope of getting good jobs at international companies in the future. Lastly, the fact that Vietnamese society considers a student as an excellent one only if he/ she can communicate fluently in English in real life, not just high scores in exams, can also be another explanation for this finding.

### **The Role of Language and Culture in the English Classroom**

The present study's findings show that cultures taught in English classrooms are no longer only those of native English speakers. Instead, Vietnamese EFL high school teachers and students believed that other cultures should also be equally introduced in the classroom so that students can communicate interculturally effectively. This finding is supported by Jenkins (2007) and Baker (2011). There are two possible explanations for this result. The first one is the change in the new textbooks that spare the last class period of each learning unit for culture. The second one is the diverse sources of teaching materials presenting different interesting cultures throughout the world.

Additionally, a statistically significant difference in perceptions towards the role of language and culture in the English classroom between Vietnamese high school EFL teachers and students with the higher mean scores rated by Vietnamese high school EFL teachers was found in the present study. It is difficult to explain this result, but it might be related to the habit of learning English from previous textbooks. It means that while teachers are positively changing their perceptions towards this issue owing to recent new-textbook training workshops, students have not been familiar with this new trend.

### **Language Use in Classroom**

The current study's findings also show that a mixture of Vietnamese and English was strongly supported to be used in English classrooms to develop students' learning English to the best of its effect by both Vietnamese teachers and students. Effective code-switching strategies were also regarded as important. These results reflect those of researchers who claimed that compared to native English speakers, non-native English teachers whose first language is the same as their students would be more capable of assisting students in enhancing their English language skills (Curran & Chern, 2017). These results are likely to be related to teachers' ability, students' level of English, and mixed-level classes. In reality, some teachers are not confident in their English-speaking ability; therefore, they rarely use English to instruct students. For classes with a large number of low achieving students, it seems impossible for teachers to use any English to instruct them. Besides, for mixed-level classes, using English in the classroom may consume much time since teachers have to use their mother tongue to explain again for

low-achieving students. However, using English entirely motivates both students and teachers to self-study for English gifted classes.

## Conclusion

The purpose of the study is to investigate how Vietnamese EFL students and teachers from gifted versus non-gifted high schools perceive four dimensions of English of a lingua franca, namely models of English use in teaching materials, using English for communication, the role of language and culture in English classroom, and language use in English classroom. The result shows that both Vietnamese EFL teachers and students bore positive perceptions towards all four dimensions of English as a lingua franca. Besides, the researcher also identified the differences among five groups: between Vietnamese EFL teachers from gifted and non-gifted high schools (difference in perceptions towards models of English used in teaching materials), between Vietnamese EFL high school gifted and non-gifted students (difference in perceptions towards using English for communication), between Vietnamese EFL teachers and students (difference in perceptions towards models of English used in teaching materials, using English for communication and the role of language and culture in the English classroom), between Vietnamese EFL teachers and students from gifted high schools (difference in perceptions towards models of English used in teaching materials and ELF in general), between Vietnamese EFL teachers and students from non-gifted high schools (difference in perceptions towards using English for communication).

Based on the present research findings, several theoretical and pedagogical implications for research, policymakers, Vietnamese high school EFL teachers, and learners were generated and discussed.

For research, the authors suggest that more research should target high-school students and in-service teachers. A cross-cultural study on the discussed issue should also be conducted to obtain a deeper understanding of factors influencing perceptions towards ELF.

For policymakers, the field of ELT materials design and evaluation needs to take findings from empirical research within the ELF scholarship into account. Also, teaching and learning English at the high school level are not only English for communication but also academic English because this is the preparation phase for students who might keep studying higher or leave school and work. Consequently, teaching English at high school should fulfill the dual-task at the foundation level. Additionally, raising awareness of the existence of ELF for both Vietnamese high school teachers is essential because of the vital role of teachers in shortening the gaps between ELF theories and practices (Yu & Liu, 2021).

For Vietnamese high school EFL teachers, non-native English models are advised to be introduced briefly. To deal with the lack of an environment for practicing English, intrinsic motivation should be fostered when extrinsic motivation is not beneficial. Providing a vision of studying abroad, getting a high salary, or promoting to important positions in international

companies can be effective. Besides, the use of technology to bring the world into the classroom via Skype, Zoom, or Microsoft Teams can help create good conditions for students to practice using ELF in the new learning environment. Similarly, assigning high-achieving students as group leaders in group discussions could help low-achieving ones have more chances to speak and lower the classroom management workload for teachers. Another considerable feature is that the culture lessons in textbooks primarily provide students with the questions of 'what' and 'how', so it is the teacher's responsibility to guide students to answer the question of 'why' so that learners could become culturally sensitive global citizens.

Finally, for Vietnamese high school EFL students, students should take advantage of different sources from the Internet, including those by native English speakers and non-native ones.

The most notable limitation of this study is that the Vietnamese EFL high school teachers and students were mostly from Southern Vietnam, particularly in Khanh Hoa province. Therefore, this is not a representative sample, thus cannot be generalized for the perceptions of all Vietnamese EFL high school teachers and students. In addition, the concept of ELF is certainly composed of many more complex dimensions than just four studied ones in the current study. Also, the limited number of gifted high schools may influence the mean comparisons between groups. Last but not least, the questionnaire originally used in the Taiwanese context was modified to contain only eleven items so that it could be used in the Vietnamese context, which may need to be tested in other contexts in order to enhance the reliability of the instrument.

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## APPENDIX 1

The newly modified scale

(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

Items	Statements	5-point Likert scale				
1	I think it is important that students be exposed to English spoken by a range of native speakers (e.g, British English, Australian English, American English, South African English...)	1	2	3	4	5
2	I think it is important that students be exposed to English used by proficient second-language speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I think it is important that classroom materials provide a range of models of English used by L1 and L2 speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I think the major focus of an English program should be teaching students to use the language in real-life communication.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I think an important focus of an English program should be to prepare students for communication with people who are not English native speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I think it is important that students can use English to share information about their own culture and traditions.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I think it is important that English teachers help students to better understand exchange students or people from other countries with whom they are likely to use English.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I think it is important that students become familiar with the cultures and traditions of speakers of English (both native and non-native ones).	1	2	3	4	5
9	I think it is important to teach students to be aware of intercultural differences and encourage them to talk about such differences.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I think a bilingual approach where Vietnamese is used as a support in English language classes is more effective for Vietnamese students.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I think it is important to teach students strategies of effective code-switching between English and Vietnamese.	1	2	3	4	5

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